FETTERED FOR LIFE

A Novel

BY

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FETTERED FOR LIFE.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LESS MASTER THAN SERVANT.

I HAD to trudge it home, the pony having pretty well as much as he could carry without me. For, in addition to the things Hebe had set down on the list, I had bought a lot of clothing for myself, a weighty packet of nails, holdfasts, etc., a washing-tub, and five live fowls. With a dozen parcels hanging on each side, two large tin milk-pans, and the washing-tub containing the fowls on top, one could see nothing of the pony but his extremities.

I was awoke in the morning by the

vigorous crowing of the cock in the stable below, and I can say with confidence that I had heard no sound for eleven years which gave me such a feeling of unclouded delight.

It would puzzle me to explain this feeling, or all of the emotions which accompanied the changing conditions of my life ; I can only attempt to set down the leading incidents which marked those changes, and leave the reader to draw his own conclusions as to their origin.

As the light coming under the eaves was yet but a slaty gray, I lay for some time listening, as pleased as a boy with his first watch, to the crowing of the cock, at the same time turning over in my mind the many alterations that must be made in the house before the rough weather set in. With so much to be done it was impossible for a man of my restless disposition to lie idle long, and so in the middle of his sixth crow I

startled the cock and sent off his hens with a screech by descending the ladder on which they were perched.

I had made up my mind to leave all the house-work to Hebe.

'She'll have to do all the sweeping and fire-lighting and that sort of thing,' said I to myself. 'That's her work, and it's best to begin as we're going on. She'll find out that there's no nonsense about me, and that I'm not going to stand any nonsense on her part. She's not a fine lady now. As soon as I've had a souse in the stream I'll begin on that dairy.'

But when I went in the house to unbolt the trap and get my packet of nails, the sight of all the parcels on the floor, where I had thrown them down higgledy-piggledy after my tiring walk, offended my prison-bred sense of propriety, so I proceeded to stack them neatly against the wall. In doing this I came upon the parcel of beefsteak and suet.

This reminded me that I had the material for a beefsteak pie, but no pasteboard and no rolling-pin. Well, there was the table I had brought down from the room above. With a few turns of the plane I could give it a clean surface that would do for to-day. So I fetched the jack plane, but, wanting light, I opened the shutters, which was a job I intended for Hebe. I couldn't leave the shavings on the floor—that looked worse than the parcels. I got the broom and swept the floor. Then when I had put the shavings in the stove, it struck me that the mere act of striking a match and setting them alight was not worth a consideration; but after the shavings had caught, I found there was no wood, and had to run out sharp for a faggot; then I had to fetch turfs to keep the fire in. It was useless letting the fire burn for nothing, but finding the kettle empty, and no water in the pitcher, I had to go down to the spring and fill it.

'A good hour wasted,' I grumbled; 'never mind. I'll make up for it now.' But no sooner had I got into the shed with my ironmongery than I bethought me the cow had to be milked. Hebe certainly couldn't do that; so I must.

'Now I can begin the dairy,' thought I, as I set down the pail of milk in the kitchen; but glancing across to see if the fire was going on all right, I caught sight of the planed table, which reminded me I had forgotten the rolling-pin.

'Oh, I'll soon knock that off,' said I, going out to find the old spoke. But a harder piece of oak I never touched with a spoke-shave, and to get it nicely round, tapering in just proportion to the end, and scraping it down smooth with a piece of broken glass, took me fully two hours, and I had only just tied a string loop on the top to hang it up by when Hebe came to tell me that breakfast was ready

'You have been up a long while, Gregory,' she said. 'Have you done a great deal ?'

'No,' said I savagely ; 'I've made a rolling-pin—that's all.'

'Did you get up so early in order to do that ?'

'No, I didn't,' I growled ; 'I had to plane the table for a pasteboard ; and now,' I added, with increased acerbity as I heard a whinnying from the stable, 'there's that pony wants feeding.'

'Oh, you have bought some fowls,' she cried cheerfully, when following me to the stable-door she caught sight of them scratching over the straw.

'Cuk-cuk ! cuk-cuk ! cuk !' cried the cock, pulling himself up, shaking his wattle, and fixing one red eye on Hebe.

'We shall have some eggs now,' she said gleefully.

'Can't make custards without 'em, can you ?' said I gruffly. 'There's some grain

in that bin; throw some down for them outside.'

'But you don't care for custards, Gregory,' she said in a low tone, as she went to the bin.

'Get over, do!' I cried to the pony, who was sticking his haunches in my way.

The fowls ran eagerly out after Hebe. It gave her pleasure to feed them. I saw a sunny light in her face as I passed the door; but her mind seemed absorbed in another reflection when I came down from the loft with an armful of hay for the cow. She walked in silence beside me towards the cottage, but on the threshold she said, as if nothing had occurred since she last spoke to me:

'That was very kind of you.'

After breakfast we undid some of the parcels, for they were all so much alike that I couldn't make out which contained the things I had bought for myself. The first was the draper's. My wife was pleased with

everything she found in it, but most with a couple of ready-made print dresses.

'Here is something that was not down on my list, I am sure,' she said; 'what are they?'

'The man called them peignoirs. I took 'em in order that you might have something suitable to work in at once.'

'They are very pretty,' she said, taking no notice of my ungracious explanation. 'And what are these?'

'Bonnets. You can't go out without something on your head.'

They were the ordinary poke sun-bonnets worn by the Devonshire peasants. Anything more ugly in itself it would be difficult to invent; and yet when Hebe, after unfolding them with amused curiosity, put one on her head to try it, I thought nothing could be prettier. It was the sort of head-dress she might herself have chosen for a fancy-dress ball. Her face looked smaller than ever in

the deep white hood; her eyes deeper and more lustrous; the loose hair that fringed her brow and temples darker. It added to the quaint gravity of her expression as she turned timidly to me for approval, half fearing, I think, that I should burst into derisive laughter; and then, again, it lent a piquant fascination to the arch smile that twinkled in her features when she perceived that the effect was not ridiculous. I turned away to open another parcel that she might not see my admiration, not unconscious of my own weakness in yielding to its influence.

'This is just what I wanted for aprons. I shall make them to come right round, and with a bib.'

'These are your shoes,' said I.

'Fours. I forgot to put down the number. How did you guess it?'

It would have been strange if I had forgotten the proportions of a figure that was better known to me than my own.

'I took the first that came to hand,' said I; 'they're stout, and that's the main thing.'

'House shoes, too.'

'You couldn't do without 'em. That's grocery.'

'How did you carry all these things home?'

'The pony carried 'em; I didn't.'

'Did he carry you as well?'

'No, I walked.'

She was silent for a moment; then she said regretfully:

'It was thoughtless of me to make such a long list without considering how the things were to be carried. And you added to the list instead of reducing it.'

'That doesn't concern you,' said I, seizing my parcel. 'You'll find me among the rocks when you want me; I'm going to see about the dairy.'

'*That* does concern me,' she said, attempting to smile. 'May I come and see what you are going to do?'

'Yes, if you like.'

She followed me to the rocks, and looked with interest at the cavern formed by the two great blocks of granite.

'How cool it is in here!' said she; 'and I can almost stand upright.'

'Oh, there'll be plenty of head room when I have cleared away the rubble on this side. I shall stack it up neatly along there for the pans to stand on.'

'And I dare say you could find a nice flat stone to lay at one end to roll the butter on.'

'How would that one over there do?' I asked, warming up.

'Why, that is the very thing, if you could only move it.'

'Oh, that's nothing; which end would you like it?'

'Up here, I think, Gregory. It's lighter, and there's more room.'

'Yes, the other end I shall fill up with stones. Here I shall set up a rough door.'

'If you could fix a shelf anywhere, we could use this as a larder as well as a dairy.'

'Why, so we could. There's a bit of inch stuff up in the loft will just do, nicely planed up; and I can put a few hooks up to hang things on.'

'Oh, that will be capital! Hark! what is that?' she asked, suddenly turning and raising her finger.

I listened: the fowls were making a terrible clatter.

'They've laid an egg amongst 'em!'

'Do you think so, already?'

'We'll go and see.'

A fowl on the threshold of the stable was proclaiming her achievement, and the others were congratulating her.

'Here it is,' said I, finding the egg in a corner of the manger.

Hebe, coming to my side, took it with an exclamation of delight.

'There's an old basket or two in the shed.

I'll nail them against the wall for nests,' said I.

She suggested that I should put up a perch also for the fowls to roost on, and then, turning to caress the full-eyed cow, she said:

'I must learn to milk the cow: will you show me how?'

'Yes, and I'll make you a proper stool with three legs.'

'Thank you, Gregory.'

Then she turned to caress the pony, who, jealous of her attentions to the cow, had jogged her elbow with his nose.

'What kind-looking creatures they are,' she said. 'What is the pony's name?'

'He hasn't got one yet; but we can call him Kit.'

'Kit!' she murmured; 'poor Kit!' and putting her arm under his neck, she laid her pale, delicate cheek against his rough hide.

She was dressed in one of the print dresses,

and wore a sun-bonnet when she came to tell me that dinner was ready. She looked like a princess playing the part of a peasant, and nothing else, the plainness of her attire only serving as a foil to her natural charms of face and figure. As she stood there, with the blue sky and summer clouds beyond, she was to me a vision of purity and grace. I could not think of her impurity. My mind recoiled from the attempt. It seemed like looking down from a flower to seek the corruption on which it fed. It was well that I stood deep in the shadow of the cave, and that I had time to recover my senses before I came out into the light.

'You are not going back to work,' she said, when I rose from the table.

'Why not?' I asked brusquely.

'It is Sunday.'

That had not occurred to me, though I might have guessed it by the bustle in the town over-night.

'Well, I shan't shock the susceptibilities of anyone by employing my time to advantage here.'

'It is good to rest one day in the week,' said my wife quietly. 'If you would like to go for a walk over the moors, Gregory.' she added, after a pause, 'I shall be quite content to—to stay in my room until you come back.'

This was another way of telling me I might imprison her when I went away. The proposal staggered me.

'It's pretty hot up there,' I said.

'I have put up the skylight.'

'You can't look out of the window.'

'That is a pity. The moor looks lovely today.'

'You have nothing to read.'

'No.'

'And you are willing to be locked up there?'

'If you think it necessary.'

I asked myself if I should submit her to this self-sought suffering.

'No,' said I, getting up ; 'I prefer to work. You can go out if you choose.'

But when I got back to the cave I found that the spirit had gone out of me. More than once to-day a feeling had been revived in my heart that I thought was dead for ever ; perhaps this disinclination to work on the Sunday was the reassertion of an old sentiment.

For half an hour or more I sat in the cave balancing in my hand the hammer I had taken up, thinking over my wife's offer to be shut up in that oven of a room.

Her submission perplexed me ; it was entirely contrary to what I had expected, and in consequence I found it contrary to reason. Why had she given in so readily? Why did she seek to conciliate me ? I could not make out, and in vainly looking for an explanation there was that confusion in my mind that the

aspect of new surroundings conveys after a heavy sleep. No wonder: my mind was but just regaining its faculties after a sleep of six years.

The hammer slipped from my hand, and I took up the parcel of clothes from the shed into the loft. I would do as she suggested, since I could not work—all except locking her up. I couldn't do that. I changed my clothes, putting on the new tweed suit and flannel cap I had bought the night before. I did not perceive even then that in putting on decent clothes for Sunday wear I had unconsciously fallen into another habit of the past.

My wife was sitting in the shade of a boulder by the brook when I went out. She did not see me, and I strode off in another direction.

I could think of nothing but Hebe. As I went over all that had happened—pretty much as I have written it here—I was struck by the naïve simplicity of our conversation; but I failed to see that while my simplicity was

artless as a Bœotian's, hers was the disguise of astute intelligence.

'One of us *must* be a fool,' I said, without, however, regarding myself as the fooled one.

She had found herself, a delicate and frail woman, pitted against a savage. Quick to see that stubborn opposition would entail nothing but discomfiture to herself, she had pursued the wise task of subduing me through my own weakness. Her first appeal was to my lowest animal instinct. She had stimulated and gratified my appetite for good things. I had accepted her guidance as unsuspectingly as the bear who climbs to the top of a pole for a bun. She had made further progress by flattering my vanity, and then made an adroit appeal to my generosity by offering a condition that otherwise I myself might have demanded. I had refused to imprison her, and given her a certain amount of liberty which could never be retracted.

I saw all this later on, but my intellect was too torpid to grasp it then.

I had lost myself amongst the rocks in returning, when, mounting a block higher than the rest to discover if I could find the course of the stream, a faint cry reached my ear. Looking about me, I saw in the distance the mound that marked the cottage, a patch of silver where the brook spread into a pool, and then midway between them a white figure that I knew must be Hebe. I recognised her voice when she called again. I flourished my cap in answer, and hurried along, wondering what had happened to make her call to me.

I lost sight of her for some time after getting down from the rock; but as she cried from time to time, the sound of her voice grew more distinct. What was it she cried? Not 'Gregory': the word was shorter than that.

Presently, getting clear of the larger

boulders, I saw her struggling through the heath not a hundred yards off. Seeing me, she stopped dead short. She pushed her hair back as if to see clearer, and stood there immovable, straining her eyes as I approached. Then when I spoke she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

'I thought it was my husband!' she sobbed.

CHAPTER XXXV.

OUR DOMESTIC ECONOMY.

After the first passionate outburst of grief, my wife sat silent, one hand resting on the rock beside her, the other covering her downcast eyes. I should not have known she was crying still, but that I saw, from time to time, a tear drop through her quivering fingers. They made not the slightest impression on me. I neither rejoiced in her sorrow nor pitied her. I simply watched in stupid bewilderment. She was more incomprehensible than ever.

'It's rum, though,' said I at length, giving expression to my thoughts. 'I can't make you out a bit.'

She made no reply as she slid her hand from the rock to her pocket for her handkerchief.

'I should have thought you'd have gone out of your wits with terror at the prospect of meeting Kit,' I pursued. 'And here you are breaking your heart with disappointment because I'm not him.'

She put her handkerchief up to her eyes with a long, convulsive sigh.

'One would think you loved him,' I added.

She raised her tear-stained face, and after looking at me for a moment in silence, she said :

'Yes ; one would think I loved him. Even you might, if you could think at all.'

I wasted a good deal of thought on that subject without coming to a satisfactory conclusion.

She rose, and we walked towards the cottage for some distance without speaking.

'I thought you were at work,' she explained, when we had gone a hundred yards. 'And in

the distance your figure looked like his. He used to wear gray, too.'

'And supposing you had not been mistaken—supposing it had been Kit, and not me—what should you have done?'

'Whatever my heart prompted me to do,' she replied, with an impulsive movement of her hands.

'You had no better plan in your head than that?'

'No; I think there is no better plan than that at any time.'

'Do you mean to say you have not prepared an excuse?' I asked incredulously.

'I don't know what excuse you think I could prepare.'

'It's difficult enough, I'll allow, considering how you have wronged him.'

'If he loved me,' she said, taking no notice of my retort, 'he would want no excuse. If he did not love me, he would not believe anything I said in my defence.'

'There's something in that: *I* wouldn't believe you.'

Her lips silently expressed the contempt she had for my regard.

'And I'm mistaken in your husband,' I continued, 'if he'd believe you, either. But I warn you he will call you to account sooner or later.'

'I can but tell him the truth.'

'And you think that will satisfy him.'

'Would it satisfy you if I told you the truth?'

The sarcastic tone in which she asked the question suggested that it had a double meaning.

'Oh, it's a matter of indifference to me,' I replied cavalierly.

'And so it will be to him if he has ceased to love me.'

The truth of this was apparent to me, for I felt no desire to exact an explanation.

'And in the other case?' I asked, curious

to have a decision that I could not form for myself.

She shook her head, doubtfully fixing her eyes on the horizon.

'It is hard to put myself in his place,' she said. 'If I were told he had wronged me, I would beg him on my knees to explain all. I would believe anything he told me, rather than anything I had been told by others. Even if his explanation seemed improbable, I would try to think it true, rather than accept the belief that he did not love me. But I have not suffered as he has, and I am only a woman.' She was silent for a minute; then she said suddenly, 'Oh, I can imagine his feelings, with no one to breathe hope into his heart!'

She stopped short with a strained expression on her face, as though a terrible picture had been revealed to her; when she spoke again her voice was hardly audible.

'He would not wait for explanation,'

she said; 'he would kill me without a word.'

'Yes; if I loved you now as I loved you then,' thought I, remembering my purpose when I broke out of prison: 'it's a good job for both of us that I have got over that folly.'

* * * * *

I was glad to get to work again the next morning. Hebe scarcely entered my thoughts until the dairy was finished, and then I fetched her, under the pretence of uncertainty as to where she would have the pans set: in reality, I wanted praise for what I had done. I was just like a boy who has made a rabbit-hutch or cut out a boat.

'This is famous,' said she; 'I can stand on tiptoe without touching the top, and what a good strong shelf!'

'Nails all along the front here, you see, to hang things on.'

'Capital. I dare say I shall find some-

thing to hang up. It won't break down, will it ?'

'Oh dear no ! Go and fetch the beefsteak pie.'

'That won't break it,' she said with a laugh. 'You only left a tiny piece, and I have just put it on the table for dinner. But there's quite a lot of things I can put on. Shall I bring them now, or will you come in and have dinner ?'

'Fetch 'em now, and I'll turn that pail of new milk into the pans.'

'Oh, Gregory,' she said, turning back at the door, 'there are three eggs this morning !'

'Bravo ! You have 'em for dinner; I don't want 'em. I can make up with cheese.'

'There's a pudding as well — the roly-poly.'

I was so pleased that I nearly said, 'That's a good girl !' but I just stopped myself in time to substitute 'thing' for 'girl.'

Still in the best of tempers, I went in to

dinner, after carefully washing my hands and face and brushing my trousers. The look of the dinner-table and the room, and an odour of raspberry jam wafting out from the bubbling pot on the stove, added to my satisfaction. Hebe had brought down her precious table. It stood near the window with a glass of wild-flowers in the middle, cottons and threads on the side, and my carving before the chair on which she had been sitting at work. That flattered my vanity. Then on a chair lay an apron already finished, and more stuff taking form. It pleased me to see that she had not been idle, and I deemed it right to encourage her.

'That's a very good apron,' I said.

She made a mock curtsey, while I looked about enjoying the homely aspect.

'I want to get well on with my stitching to-day,' she said, 'for the bread won't last beyond Wednesday, and we must certainly try to make some to-morrow. I'm almost

afraid of it, though,' she added, shaking her head dubiously.

'Oh, that's all right,' said I, with fatuous confidence; 'I'll help you.'

Hebe smiled. I thought then that she was pleased at the prospect; now I don't.

'Do you think that we might turn the cow and pony out on the moor?' she asked, diverting the conversation. 'It seems a shame to confine them in the dark stable on such a beautiful day.'

'They do turn cows and ponies out, to be sure. I suppose the cow would come in at milking-time.'

'And I think I can answer for Kit coming to me when I call him. He whinnies every time I go in. Where are you going, Gregory?'

'I forgot to give the beast any food this morning.'

'But I gave him some.'

I nodded my satisfaction, and continued eating.

After all, I reflected, it was better to have a useful help than an insubordinate prisoner to deal with, and far more rational to make the best of a bad job than to make things worse. Already my scheme of vengeance had lost its heroic proportions, and I was beginning to look back upon my terrible design with something like wonder and contempt, as one in broad daylight regards the mighty projects of the night, which fade away from the mind on first awaking.

The creatures being turned out of the stable in the afternoon, I gave the place a thorough clean up, carrying the litter into the enclosure, where I determined to dig it in before long.

'There's no reason why we shouldn't grow potatoes here,' said I to Hebe; 'they do well enough in the prison grounds; then I shan't have to drag them ten miles whenever you want them. And we might try cabbages and onions.'

I said this to please her, fancying that she

liked cooking, from her readiness in taking to it. But she let the work drop on her lap—she was seated near the open door, and I had just emptied the last basket of rubbish—and looked at me vacantly.

'But don't potatoes take a long while to grow?' she asked.

'To be sure they do; they can't be planted for months yet.'

'Surely Kit will come before then?' she murmured almost plaintively.

'Why, that depends. As he ain't turned up yet, I shouldn't wonder if he's been collared and taken back.'

'No, no,' she pleaded; 'it is too soon to expect him yet. He may be waiting until there is less likelihood of his being recognised.'

'I don't know. I'm disposed to think he's nabbed. However, that's neither here nor there. There's no reason why we shouldn't turn the ground to use in case he doesn't

come. And if he does come, he'll never want to leave this nice little house, I know. He'll be just as content as me to stay here all the rest of his days, and I'll stay with him, if he's any way companionable. If we all pull together, we three may be as cheerful as crickets here.'

Her fingers relaxed their hold upon the stuff, and dropped like lead by her side, while her eyes wandered vaguely across the desert before her.

As for me, I was so well pleased with the idea of living in the manner I suggested that I overlooked her want of proper enthusiasm, and went back to my work.

After making the stable as neat as a prison cell, and promising it a coat of whitewash before long, I set about clearing up the loft. I got the hay and straw neatly placed at one end, resolving at an early date to make a trap over the mangers, so that I could drop the fodder down instead of carrying it by the

ladder; and then, having brushed the floor and the roof and walls clear of dust and cobwebs, I laid down a neat little bed of straw, with a lump evenly rolled for a bolster, to serve for my own use at night.

'That is better than throwing myself down anywhere, and waking up with my head in a hole,' said I to myself, regarding the arrangement I had made with pride.

But just as in developing a mechanical idea one improvement invariably led to another, my awakened sense of propriety could not rest content with one step in advance, and before I had used the bed that had pleased me so much, I was meditating something better.

'Would it be too late to plant some scarlet-runners along the front of the house?' my wife asked at tea.

Seeing me absorbed in thought, she believed, I fancy, that I was dwelling on the garden scheme.

'Scarlet-runners? No. I'll get some next time I go into the town, and you can stick 'em in wherever you like. I've got no time for that just now; I'm thinking about something else.'

'May I ask what you are thinking about?'

'I'm thinking about a bedroom for myself.'

'Where *do* you sleep, Gregory?'

'In the loft, over the stable.'

'Over the stable!' she repeated, with a little accent of horror.

'It's hardly gentlemanly, is it?'

'It isn't nice, certainly.'

'No, it isn't. And so I'm thinking if I can't build a room on to the back of the cottage, with a door opening between the cupboard and the stove, and a lean-to roof about twelve foot by four.'

'Oh, anything will be better than sleeping over the stable. Make a lean-to roof, by all means.'

'I will. And I've got a notion for a bedstead with a drawer underneath to keep my clothes in.'

'How ingenious you are, Gregory!' she said in a low tone.

I did not deny it. I felt I was a genius. I was a boy again in this, the beginning of another life, and had the same sentiment of gratified vanity that thrilled me in the old days when I overheard Mr. Northcote say in a whisper of wonder to my mother, 'Only ten! he'll be a great man, ma'am.'

'That is all the bread,' my wife said, as I cut another hunch; 'I thought it would last till Wednesday; but one eats so heartily here.'

This reminded me that bread had to be made next day, and that I had promised to help.

'I'll make the paste to-night,' said I; 'it ought to stand all night. I know that, because I had a turn as bakehouse orderly one week. Oh! I know all about it. I have

only to see a thing once done to be master of it.'

'Could not I do it?' asked my wife, with a lingering remembrance, I expect, of my work during the afternoon.

'You can clear the table and get out the flour; but it needs a man to make bread; it has to be kneaded well.'

She cleared the table and fetched the flour, while I took off my coat and turned up my sleeves. I made a large ring of flour, as if I were going to mix mortar, and poured some water in the middle.

'It's running out here, Gregory!' cried Hebe.

So it was on the other side; however, I worked in the flour before much more than half a pint of water had escaped, and in a minute or so my hands and wrists were glued up in the sticky mess. The expression on Hebe's face was piteous as she watched me dragging the paste off my fingers one by one.

'Will you have the baking-powder now?' she asked.

'You don't use baking-powder in bread,' said I scornfully; 'bread was invented thousands of years before such rubbish as baking-powder was thought of—salt now. I must have some salt in it.'

She brought me the salt-cellar, and I emptied it.

'More flour!' I called, working away at the dough.

It was indescribably sticky; and the way in which it spread up my arms and got on to my clothes was unaccountable; but by dint of adding more and more flour I at length got it to a tough consistency. But the kneading it required before all the lumps of dry flour disappeared astonished us both.

'There's one thing,' said I: 'we shan't have to make bread again for a fortnight.'

Indeed, the mess was four times more than I intended, in consequence of having to add

so much flour to absorb the superfluity of water. It would have filled a bushel basket. 'Warm work,' said I, bending my head round to wipe the perspiration from my face on my shoulder. There was paste there even ; I felt it caking on my temples as I went on. Hebe had silently lit the lamp before it was all over.

'We shall have to bake it in batches,' said she, regarding the oven and looking at the stove ; 'it won't all go in the oven at one time.'

'Do you think it's going to baked in there ?' I asked derisively. 'What's the oven outside for ?'

'I was afraid it might not be quite clean,' she suggested ; 'and—and I don't think I know how to manage one of those ovens.'

I told her not to bother about that, as I could surely bake the bread if I had made it. And the next morning I swept out the oven, and fired it with some faggots of brushwood ;

while the fire was burning out I cut up the dough in lumps—it had got sticky in the night, and required more flour, and also it had not risen as I anticipated. But I was proud of my loaves when I had made them up and cut a fancy design on the top of each with a knife. Hebe was also pleased with their look, and helped me to carry them out to the oven when I had drawn out the embers with a spade.

Just before dinner I opened the oven, Hebe standing by, and as eager as I to see nice brown loaves.

It was an odd spectacle that met our eyes. A pale, flat cake spread all over the floor of the oven, with here and there a faint white trace of the ornament I had put on my loaves. All their shape was gone—they formed one solid, flat lump. It staggered us both.

'It doesn't look quite cooked enough,' said Hebe, who was the first to find speech.

I tried to break a piece off, for clearly it

couldn't be taken out in a lump; it was like brick.

'Oh, it's cooked enough!' said I. 'But there's something the matter with it.'

'Gregory!' cried she, 'I forgot the yeast!'

'So we did,' said I, for I could not fix all the blame on her. 'Never mind. I'll be bound Kit will eat it with his beans when it's broken up.'

But Kit couldn't eat it, and it had to be soaked before the fowls would touch it.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I AM PUZZLED ABOUT MY WIFE—AND MYSELF.

The worst of it was that I should have to make another journey now for bread.

Seeing that this added to the vexation I felt in my failure as a baker, Hebe offered to try to make a loaf in her own way.

'There is still a little flour left in the other bag,' said she, 'and I think with a little cream——'

'You can but try,' said I, glad of an excuse to postpone the journey, for I was burning to begin my building; 'if it don't do I can have bacon for tea.'

It never occurred to me that if it did not do Hebe would have nothing. I was as selfish

and thoughtless as a child, and not a very nice child, either.

However, when tea-time came there was a fine brown loaf on the table that she had baked in her own oven, besides a pat of fresh butter that she had whipped in the morning. The bread was excellent—light, and sweet as cake; as for the butter—a delicacy I had not seen for eleven years—I found it more delicious than any I had ever before tasted.

These things she did with so little fuss that I had not felt it necessary to help her in any way. And so, being in a rare good humour, pleased with her and myself, too (for I had done a famous good afternoon's work, cutting out the framework of my room, all ready to put together), I spent an hour after tea in making a stool for my wife, in order that she could begin milking the cow next morning. To cap this, instead of going back to my carpentry, I dug up a strip along the front of the house for sowing scarlet runners, and

nailed up a rough lattice to train them upon. It was almost too dark to see when I called Hebe out to admire what I had done.

'You must be quite tired out,' my wife said, when I came in to supper and sat down with a grunt of satisfaction.

'Tired! not I. A man can never have too much of a good thing. I feel that I could never have enough of it. And work is a good thing: it's the secret of happiness.'

I wanted Hebe to agree with me in that. She made no response.

'For, after all,' I continued, 'happiness is only another name for contentment, and,' I added, glancing from the flowers under the lamp to the roll of butter and the clean table-cloth, and thence to the work neatly folded on the table by the window, and back again to my wife in her pretty dress, 'I am contented.'

'I am glad to hear it,' she said, in her quiet, grave way.

I wanted her to say 'So am I,' or something of that sort. As she did not, I sought to provoke discussion by repeating my axiom, 'Work is the secret of happiness,' and as she was still silent, I added: 'You don't think so?'

'Not entirely,' she replied. 'Or one might be happy in prison.'

That finished the argument, and put me out. I had not sufficient wit to defend my proposition, but just enough to draw an unpleasant conclusion from her objection. She was a prisoner, and therefore not happy: that was what her words implied clearly. I didn't like it. It seemed to me that she ought to be happy. Considering the treatment I had proposed to subject her to, my present lenience, not to say kindness, deserved a more grateful recognition. It was hardly fair of her to hint that she was a prisoner. I no longer fastened her up in her room; only for common protection I locked the lower door at night; but all

the day long she was free to go where she liked. To be sure, in her condition, as I had taken pains to show, it was hardly possible that she could make her way alone across the moor; but she was at liberty to try. 'She is disposed to take advantage of my indulgence,' I said to myself as I thought the matter out on my bed in the loft. 'I shall have to be more severe with her.' But this resolution evaporated in the night.

'Supposing,' thought I, in the morning—'supposing she finds life here intolerable, and, despairing of her husband's coming, she should try to escape, and succeed—what then? Shall I be just as content then? Shall I find the secret of happiness in work?' I was thunderstruck to perceive that I should have no inclination to work if she were not there to admire it. It was a revelation.

'Supposing I should find the door open and the house empty when I go down?' I continued, pursuing this new train of ideas. I

stood with one arm half way through the sleeve of my coat, terrified by my own suggestion. It was not that I feared to lose the vengeance I had promised myself during six years—that had gone from my thoughts in as many days—but that I dreaded to lose the companion who in some way inscrutable to my understanding was making life more enjoyable than the realization of my most passionate dreams. It was with a feeling of intense relief that I found the door as I had left it; but my mind was not easy until my wife called me to breakfast, and told me, with animation in her face, that she had succeeded in milking the cow. Nothing I had done myself gave me greater delight than this achievement.

Nevertheless, I did not at once forget my fright, and going over the moor that night I considered how I might prevent her from going away, and at the same time make existence more agreeable to her. The pony was

more heavily loaded than ever on the return journey.

I was putting up a shelf under the long window in our living-room when Hebe came down in the morning.

'Is that for my work?' she asked cheerfully.

'You'll see what it's for directly. Wait till I've run another nail into this bracket.'

Looking round for an explanation, she cried in surprise:

'You have lit the fire!'

'Yes. I've been thinking that lighting fires and fetching water is more of a man's work than a woman's. There, now, that will hold anything.'

With that I threw down the hammer, ran out to the shed where I had unburdened the pony overnight, and returned with half a dozen pots of flowers in my arms.

'Oh, Gregory!' exclaimed my wife, clapping her hands together as I entered, my head quite hidden in the mass of bloom.

'Here, take 'em,' said I, 'and set 'em of a row. That's a fuchsia, and that's a pelargonium, and these two are roses, and these others—I forget their names, but they are bluebells of some sort that are to be trained on a frame. I'll make you a couple after breakfast.'

'Aren't they beautiful?' she cried, putting them down with tender care, and smelling each one in turn.

Her thin white fingers absolutely trembled with pleasure.

'Don't spread 'em out too much,' said I; 'there's something more to go on the shelf at each end.'

'More flowers? Tell me what,' she pleaded, putting her hand on my arm as, with a shake of the head, I was going out.

It was the first time in our new life that she had intentionally touched me; it was almost as if her touch had set up a galvanic current between us. Our eyes met, and for

an instant neither of us spoke. I could not understand myself, nor her either. Every particle of colour had gone from her face. The pupils of her eyes, dilated as if to take in every ray reflected from mine, seemed to penetrate to my very soul. Was this merely the effect of curiosity in regard to the things I had bought for her—or what?

'*Tell me*,' she murmured, with a depth of meaning that I did not fathom.

'It's not so much, after all,' said I, regaining my senses. 'You'll be disappointed if you go expecting too much.'

'*Tell me*,' she repeated entreatingly.

'Why, it's like this,' said I; 'I've been thinking over what we talked about the night before last. You know. I held that work is the secret of happiness. And so it is. Only as you can't work so much as I can, it stands to reason there must be a lot of time hanging heavily on you, when you're likely to fall into

a fit of the blues. So I just brought you something interesting to read.'

'Is that all?' she said, in a tone of dejection, her hand dropping from my arm.

'There, I told you you'd be disappointed. What did you expect?'

'I thought you were going to tell me something about my husband.'

'Well, that's odd. I've got something to tell you about him, too. I saw it in a paper at the inn where I put up the pony. I've got it somewhere.' I pretended to search my pocket for the paper, which, needless to say, existed only in my imagination. 'There, I must have dropped it coming home. However, I remember it well enough; there were only a couple of lines. "The young man arrested on suspicion of being the escaped convict, Kit Wyndham, has been liberated." That shows that we may still expect to see him here some time or other.'

'Some time!' she echoed, dropping into a chair.

I could not stand the look of her eyes, and to escape them went out to fetch the interesting literature I had bought: a complete edition of the 'British Encyclopædia,' in twenty-six quarto volumes.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

MY WIFE IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO ME.

My wife was in a strange state of excitement that morning. I couldn't understand her. It seemed to me that she did not know what she was about.

At breakfast she asked me to repeat the paragraph from the paper about Kit; and when I went over it word for word as I had invented it the night before, she listened with an inexplicable quivering in the corners of her lips, as if the next moment she might burst out into wild laughter or tears.

'So you see,' I said, 'Kit's all right; only he thinks it wise to keep out of sight for a time.'

'Yes, yes,' she assented cheerfully. 'I am sure he is safe now, and that all he does is for the best.'

Whenever I glanced towards her I found her eyes upon me; and though the expression on her face was at times pitiful, happiness predominated.

In the morning, while I was at work behind the house, I heard her call:

'Kit! Kit!'

Instinctively I stepped forward to see what she wanted—forgetting in my occupation that my name was Gregory now. I found her looking towards me, and not at the pony she had called. A little later on she came to me in great delight.

'Oh, come here, I have something to show you!' she said.

I followed her, wondering what discovery she had made, round to the rocks behind the dairy, where she stealthily pointed out the brown hen sitting in a mud hole.

'She has one egg under her already,' said she. 'We will leave them, and then in time we shall have a brood of young chickens.'

'I'll make a coop for them when they come,' said I.

'Oh, that will be famous!' said she, without questioning, any more than I, what purpose a coop could serve. Her delight was that of a young girl.

When I was putting up the shutters at night she came to my side, and, looking over the moor, called my attention to the sheet of white mist that lay like a lake in the hollow, and then to the purple tor standing up in savage majesty against the pale light in the west.

'I never knew the moor was so grand and beautiful,' she said in a low tone of awe.

'Well,' thought I, as I lay down that night, 'I did well to humour her. We shall jog along comfortably now. It's ten times better to see her cheerful than with a face as long as

a fiddle. Now I can get on with my work comfortably. No need to bother my head about her for awhile.'

And probably I should not have bothered my head any more if things had gone on in the same course. But the very next day something happened to renew my anxiety.

While I was on a ladder knocking out a stone for my joist, Hebe came and called, in whispering alarm :

'Gregory!'

'Well, what is it now?' I asked, still chipping at the stone.

'There's a man coming towards the house!'

'A man!' I echoed, descending the ladder, cold chisel in one hand, hammer in the other. In another moment I should have strode into sight, but that she threw herself before me.

'He is quite close—he will see you!' she whispered in terror. 'It may be a detective —an officer in disguise—come to take you away,' she explained.

I had forgotten my *rôle* of an escaped convict.

'Hide yourself — anywhere. Oh, don't waste a moment!' she continued. 'I will see him, and find something to say.'

I hesitated. I had no fear of apprehension, but I did fear that this might be some agent of the Major's in pursuit of Hebe.

'You can trust me. You do not think I would betray you?' she asked.

Her look, her words, recalled the past, and for a moment stirred up the embers of passion into a flame.

'It wouldn't be the first time you have betrayed a man,' I said harshly. 'I will trust myself rather than you. Stay here.'

I shook her hand from my arm, and marched off to the front of the house. The stranger was not twenty yards off. He was dressed in a fishing costume, and carried a rod on his shoulder; that did not satisfy me that he was not a detective. He nodded and came on, eyeing me curiously.

I did not present a very inviting figure, standing there armed with my chisel and hammer, my face whitened with the dust from the stone and mortar I had been chipping out.

'Can you let me have some refreshment?' said he, coming to a stand in front of me. 'I'm dead beat—lost my way.'

'I've got nothing to give you.'

'I don't want you to give. I'll pay what you like.'

'I've nothing to sell.'

'Can I sit down?'

'Yes, where you like—out there.'

'Well,' said he, after looking me up and down, 'you're a nice, hospitable sort of a fellow, I must say. Do you mind telling me the way to Newton?'

'How did you find your way here?'

'Why, I spotted your cottage from the distance.'

'You've got a pretty long sight—there's not a trout-stream for five miles.'

'I tell you I lost my way. Is Newton north, south, east, or west? that is all I want to know.'

'West.'

He must have known that was a lie, for after measuring me again from tip to toe in contempt, he said:

'I've a good mind to give you a lesson in civility, you confounded boor!'

I laughed in his face, and clinked my hammer with the chisel significantly.

He stopped another minute, regarding me in silence, as though he would fix my features definitely in his memory; and then he stalked off in the direction of Newton.

If he knew Newton lay out there, why had he asked me? How had he strayed so far across the most desolate part of the moor, where the likelihood of finding a road or a habitation was practically out of the question? It was a thousand times more probable that he had come by design rather than by acci-

dent, and in that case he must be a spy—a detective employed by the Major to find Hebe.

Without a doubt he had seen her ; then what conclusion could he draw from her sudden disappearance and my savage look and brutal reception, but that I had compelled her to get out of sight and opposed his approach to avoid discovery?

These thoughts passed through my mind as I watched him out of sight.

'Who was it?' asked my wife, still greatly agitated, when I went back to her.

'Only a fool who had lost his way, and it's lucky for him he was nothing else,' I said, with a menacing movement of the hammer in my hand.

My manner terrified her.

'Surely,' she said, 'you wouldn't——' she could go no further.

'Yes, I would—I would brain him. And you can tell him so if he comes again.'

She looked at me with indescribable pity, and went away without another word.

I took it into my head to suspect her of treachery. Why had she been so solicitous on my behalf? I asked myself—to obtain my sanction to her holding communication with this man. Why had she been so mighty pleasant the last two days?—to beguile me into a sense of security. I even conceived it possible that some understanding already existed between them—that he had found means to communicate with her in my absence by slipping a letter under the door. Wild and inconsistent as these suppositions were, they seemed feasible enough to me.

Two or three times in the course of the afternoon I went round to the front of the house to look over the moor. Hebe scanned it as eagerly as I.

'I will watch carefully,' she said. 'Nothing shall escape me.'

I managed to find an ill construction to put on this promise of devotion.

She smiled no more that day. Her depression I attributed to disappointment in the failure of the scheme.

Twice in the night I crept stealthily down from the loft, under the conviction that I heard the lock of the cottage door being picked. Before it was fairly light I was on my way to Tavistock. The landlord of the inn where I usually baited the pony was a dog fancier.

'I want a dog,' said I. 'What is that one that I hear barking—is he for sale?'

'Oh, he's for sale, as far as that goes; but he ain't what you would call a lady's dog.'

'I don't want a lady's dog.'

'And he ain't much to look at, and he ain't a sporting dog, and he ain't much of a breed neither: in fact, it's easier to tell you what that dog ain't than what he is. But I will say this for 'im, he's got more bark in

him than half a dozen or'nary dogs, and he's that nasty tempered with strangers that I has to keep 'm in a empty pigsty by himself, and so if you want a watch-dog for a farm-yard——'

This was exactly the dog I wanted. I bought him, with the necessary appointment of a muzzle, a massive collar, and a heavy chain. He was a formidable animal, with a most forbidding aspect. In his most peaceful moments he seemed to be meditating an assault.

'It does not matter a bit about being ugly,' my wife said, when I showed my new purchase. 'If he answers our purpose and gives us a feeling of security, that is everything.'

To hear her one would have thought I had bought the brute to please her.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

NO LOVE.

At night I put the dog in the living-room ; as soon as I began to move in the morning, he gave tongue, and never stopped until I opened the door, when he would have torn me to pieces if I had not prudently left him muzzled. During the day he was chained up in the stable. His ears twitched in his sleep. When he awoke he scented the air, and whined unhappily on finding nothing to bark at. And now, feeling safe, my fears and suspicions faded away, and by the end of the week we had resumed our former tranquillity and good understanding, thanks to the equable temper of my wife and her

unceasing efforts to make the best of things. If anything troubled her, she did her utmost to conceal it; if anything pleased her, she was eager to make me participate in her pleasure. She found subjects for conversation, appealed to my judgment, acted blindly on my advice, when frequently she would have done better to disregard it; told me of her plans for the future; and kept nothing secret from me but her fears. By her admirable tact she thus drew me out and humanized me. The process was slow, indeed, but her patience was invincible, her courage indomitable.

I have seen a rugged stone in Italy that is worn quite smooth on one side with the kisses of passionate pilgrims. I, too, must have become less harsh under the tenderness lavished upon me. The very presence of grace and refinement corrects rudeness and coarse habits. She could not have continued hopeful unless she had been encouraged by signs of improvement in my nature.

The change in her attitude from passive resignation to hopeful activity dated, as I have shown, from the day I first felt a dread of losing her and showed her kindness. The change was so astonishing that it might have raised a suspicion of insincerity in a more generous mind than mine. But the alteration in her physical condition was scarcely less marked, and there was no ascribing that to subtle design. The dark lines in the orbit of her eyes gave place to a healthier tint; her face grew fuller and changed the expression of resigned endurance it had hitherto borne to cheerful expectancy. Often I found her beautiful eyes and mouth animated with a smile of satisfaction.

'Oh, it is good to feel well!' she exclaimed, one day, impulsively; she told me she had not felt so strong for years—oh! for many, many years! 'It must be the simple diet, the pure air, the occupation of our quiet life,'

she added. And I had reckoned that this quiet life would weary her to death ; that the daily drudgery and debasing association with me would degrade her to my level. I mistook her character ; unconsciously she was elevating me to her own degree.

She was proud of her bread, which improved with every baking, and of the excellence of her butter.

'Don't you think we ought to find some means of selling our butter, Gregory?' she asked one day. 'We have more than enough for our own use, and we must think about saving money for the future when mine is all gone.'

I took some to Tavistock to please her, and gave her the money it realized to take care of. I believe she regarded those few shillings as a fortune, for she had no knowledge of the value of money. She put them in a box I made for her ; she kept it near her when she sat alone working, like the

glass of flowers, to suggest pleasant ideas. My journeys from the cottage were full of dread to her now, believing, as she did, that I stood in danger of recapture. No matter how late I returned, I was sure to find her sitting in the living room. She economized the fuel to put off the day when I must hire a cart to bring a fresh supply, and suggested that I should not get it again at Newton, for fear of creating suspicion.

It was a red-letter day for her when I finished my room; another when the brown hen brought out eleven chicks; a third when the beans began to show through the brown earth. She seemed to derive a real pleasure from these trifles. Her affection for all the living creatures about her struck me as being ridiculous, until I awoke to a perception of its pathos: these creatures to her stood in the place of her lost children. But if she found pleasure in her own pursuits, she was not less interested in all that

concerned me. She did not wait to be asked for admiration of my achievements; she watched their progress, and tried to enter into all the details that occupied my thoughts, only too delighted if she found herself able to help me by a suggestion.

One wet Sunday, when I was brooding over my everlasting 'Encyclopædia,' Hebe came timidly to my side, and said:

'Will you tell me what you are thinking about, Gregory?'

'Washing.'

'Washing! I must think about that, too. We can't always be using new things.'

'No; that's what I thought. I'm finding out which is the best way. Here's an account of how the Egyptians did it—a whole history of washing; but the Continental system seems to me the most reasonable in principle.'

'I know something about that,' said she,

drawing a chair close to mine, and seating herself. 'I have watched the women *lessivent* in Normandy.'

'Tell me how they do it, for I don't quite follow this description.'

'They hang a great caldron over the fire filled with water, and the *lessive*—that's the ashes from wood fires—tied in a bag, is put in there. Then, on a stool, a little way from the fire, stands a big tub with a bag of iris-root at the bottom, and all the linen on top. From the bottom of the tub there's a pipe for the water to run off from the tub into the caldron. When the water boils, a woman scoops the water out with a ladle, and pours it out on top of the linen; it runs through, and back into the caldron. After this process, the linen is taken down to the river, and rinsed in clear, running water. I think that's how it's done.'

'A nice, old-fashioned, barbarous waste of time and labour.'

'But it makes the linen beautifully white, and the iris gives it a sweet smell.'

'Oh, I don't doubt that; but the same result could be got without any trouble.'

'Do you think you could invent a machine?'

She had a certain awe and diffidence with regard to machinery common to most women, but a profound belief in my ability.

'Think!' I exclaimed; 'I'm sure. Why, look here—there's the copper,' sketching the copper that stood by the oven; 'you put your *lessive*—all those ashes out of the oven—and your iris in, and half fill it with water. Now, here's your washing-tub with a lot of holes in the bottom for the water to drain through, and a piece of five-eighth tubing going through the middle. You stick the tub on top of the copper on a bed of rags to keep it fairly steam-tight, like a lid. The tube goes down nearly to the bottom of the copper, and up just above the level of the linen packed in the tub round

it. The top of the pipe is stopped with a cork, and half a dozen holes pierced in the circumference of the tube just underneath. Now you light your fire, and what happens?'

'I don't know, Gregory' (in a tone expressing dread of a general blow-up).

'Why, when the water boils, the steam, having practically no vent, would press on the surface of the water, and force it up the pipe, sending it in a spray over the linen in the tub; it would percolate through the linen, and escape back into the copper through the holes in the bottom of the tub, and then, as soon as it boiled again, the same process would be repeated. Thus you would do automatically exactly what is done by your old women with their ladles.'

'That seems very wonderful,' said Hebe, still faintly hoping.

'Wonderful! It's as simple as A B C. And then when the linen is sufficiently cleaned, it can be taken down to the brook and laid

among the rocks till it's rinsed and ready to lay on the heather to dry.'

'But wouldn't the steam get away through the holes in the bottom of the tub?' she asked, studying my sketch intently.

'That's what I call intelligent criticism,' said I, highly delighted to be met with an objection that I could overcome. 'On the face of it it would seem so. But you will find that the soaked linen opposes a greater resistance to the steam than the water that is free to flow up the pipe.'

'If you are not afraid of spoiling the tub, might we not try it?'

'We will try it. I'll go and get a length of tubing—inch will be better than five-eighths—to-morrow night. You're out of paraffin.'

'Oh, there's enough to last until the end of the week,' she said, with sudden anxiety.

'May as well fetch it to-morrow as then. Besides, I want some half-inch brads.'

I was about to crunch up my sketch, but

Hebe rescued it ; and some time afterwards I saw it neatly folded in the box with her butter money.

I made the washing apparatus, and spent the whole of one morning watching it at work, Hebe as delighted as I whenever the water came spluttering out from the top of the pipe over the tubful of linen. That was a great success. To be sure, I scalded my hand badly, but that was through my own carelessness ; my flannel shirts, too, were so shrunk by the process that I could not again wear them ; that, Hebe declared, was her fault—she ought to have known that flannel must not be boiled. The linen, however, when it had been rinsed and dried in the sun, was beautifully white, and in my triumph I forgot all about my scald and the spoilt shirts. As for my wife, I verily believe she was as proud of my achievement as I was.

One morning I spied her going down to the brook with a can.

'That's my work,' said I, overtaking her before she reached the water.

'I did not like to take you from your work, and I am so strong now.'

'Never mind that. You tell me if I forget it again.'

Her face flushed with pleasure.

'Wouldn't it be a good thing if we could have a pipe laid from the stream to the house, Gregory?' she asked, as we were returning side by side.

'Water won't rise above its own level,' I said contemptuously.

But this set me thinking; and I had pumps on the brain for the rest of the day.

When I went in to tea I saw one of the volumes with a piece of paper marking a place. Opening it, I found the article marked was 'Water,' and on the paper certain notes—'A powerful refractor of light'—'An imperfect conductor of heat and electricity'—and the like, showing that she had been trying to

acquaint herself with a subject that interested me. She saw that I was pleased.

'I have not come to the part about its not rising above its own level,' she said. 'Perhaps I had better "see Hydrostatics."'

'You'll find it there. I've been turning your idea over in my head, and I think I'll lay on the water as you suggested. It's horrid going down there after the rain.'

'Or in it.'

'Yes, that's worse. And it would be an immense saving of labour.'

'But if it won't rise above its own level?'

'Why, then, I'll make it,' said I, thumping the table.

She regarded me in silent admiration. For her there was nothing contemptible or ridiculous in my masterful spirit.

'I see how it's to be done, and I'll do it.'

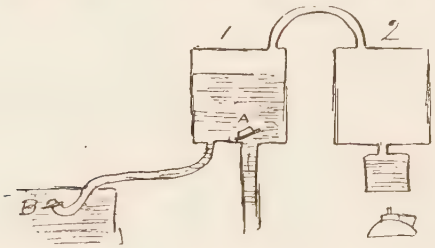
She came to my side as I turned up the cloth to make my plan on the table, and stood

behind me, her hand on the back of my chair, looking over my shoulder as I drew.

'There, they are three cylinders,' I said.

'Sort of tin canisters,' she ventured.

'That's it. Air-tight. The first and second hold, say, a couple of gallons; the third a pint. The two big ones stand on a shelf; we'll mark 'em 1 and 2; the little one stands



underneath No. 2, and a lamp stands under that. A tube connects the little cylinder with No. 2, and a syphon connects No. 2 with No. 1. A tube from the brook enters at the bottom of No. 1, the entrance closed with a valve; another tube from the bottom of No. 1 serves a reservoir out here, and also closes with a valve. Do you understand?'

Hebe looked attentively at the rough plan, which I annex, and said :

'Yes, I think I see that.'

'Now, suppose that No. 1 is filled with water, the little cylinder is also filled with water, and No. 2 contains air. In that condition the water could not run out of No. 1 if the vessels were air-tight; but if you lit the lamp under the little cylinder the steam and heat generated in No. 2 would allow the water to run out of No. 1 into the reservoir marked B. Do you see that?'

'I think so.'

'Well, if you turned out your lamp when the reservoir was full, the steam in No. 2 would condense, and run back in the form of water into the little cylinder, at the same time that the vacuum formed in No. 1 would cause the water to run up from the stream through the valve A, until the former condition of things was renewed.'

'So that by just lighting the lamp you

could bring two gallons of water from the stream right up to the house?'

'Yes, that's it; and as often as you choose.'

'That seems more wonderful than anything you have invented yet awhile, Gregory,' she said, with fresh admiration.

'It's curious,' I admitted, with a fatuous pretence of carelessness, though the blood was tingling in my veins with an excitement only known perhaps to inventors.

'But if it's so simple, why hasn't it been done before?' she asked, still marvelling over the plan.

I had to admit that perhaps it had been done before; but to this day I am ignorant of the simple contrivance being practically applied.

'You must make that, Gregory,' my wife said tenderly. 'Not only because it will be useful to us, but because it will give us fresh interest in life.'

This gratified my pride—it ought to have touched my heart.

'I've never tried my hand at practical mechanics,' I said, forgetting my assertion that I had been a watchmaker. But she marked the contradiction. I misunderstood the look of triumph in her eyes at the time; I understand it now.

'I might be able to do it,' said I, turning again to my drawing.

'Oh, I know you could!' she exclaimed; 'I am sure you could do anything!'

'I should have to set up a bench. There's room for it in the shed.'

'Why not in here? It will be cold out there in the winter.'

'The file will make a horrid grating noise.'

'What of that? It will give me pleasure to hear it. I shall like to watch the work growing into shape under your hand.'

I promised her I would think about it. And I did; nor was I quite forgetful of her. She

was certainly going on very nicely, I admitted. But my soul was unwarmed with any feeling of love for her. I regarded her simply as a pleasant and useful companion, while admitting that life under her influence was growing every day more agreeable.

The fact is, I had no love in my heart—nothing but vanity and selfishness. Even Howler, the dog, recognised this. The great ugly brute had fallen in love with my wife; he hated me. Every night he slept on the little landing at the top of the steps to be as near my wife as possible; every morning he came scuttling down the steps with every hair on his back bristling, his teeth bare, to walk stiffly round and round my legs, growling all the while. He knew there was no tenderness in my heart; but my wife would believe nothing of the kind.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

I TURN PHILOSOPHER.

One Sunday afternoon I found myself dozing over the 'Encyclopædia.' It had been raining all day; my mind was sluggish, and reading had failed to excite a new idea.

Giving myself a shake, I went to the window, thrust my hands in my pockets, and looked out over the dreary moor. Hebe sat hard by, one of the big books open before her on the shelf between two pots of flowers. There was nothing to read but the 'Encyclopædia.'

'Don't you think we might afford to extend our library?' she asked.

'We haven't read a twentieth part of what

we've got; these volumes contain all that there is worth knowing.'

'Do you think so?'

'What subject of human interest could you suggest as an addition?' I asked, with languid curiosity.

'A work of imagination.'

'Oh, a story!' said I, with a snort of contempt. 'I'll pick up a novel for you next time I go into the town, if I remember.'

'I was not thinking entirely of my own pleasure,' she said quietly.

'Well, you need not trouble your head about me. I've got all I need. Romance is good enough for a parcel of girls and boys—and women. But what on earth does a rational man want,' I asked, stretching my arms, 'with the history of courtship and marriage? They're all alike—those stories. A couple of young fools fall in love; they fall out of love; they are reconciled, and their folly is followed up by a marriage.'

'Romance is not always confined to young people; it sometimes begins after marriage.'

'Oh, if they're not young, there's less excuse for their folly, and if they can't live soberly after marriage, their adventures can have no more interest for a sane man than the vagaries of a couple of idiots at large.'

'Even the vagaries of idiots may excite our sympathy.'

'I suppose I've got no sympathy;' then I added: 'Anyhow, I don't want to have it excited by such profitless stuff.'

My desultory reading in the 'Encyclopædia' had led me to skim over one or two systems of philosophy, picking up an argument here or there which pleased me, and leaving the rest.

There was nothing in the expanse of leaden cloud and stony moor to interest me, and as Hebe was silent, I continued:

'The object of life is the attainment of happiness. True happiness is nothing but a

condition of contentment. Contentment is only to be obtained by the complete subjection of those feelings that upset the perfect balance of joy and sorrow on which equanimity depends. A wise man avoids anything which excites his feelings; and if I thought a book could stir me up either to hate or love, I would avoid it as carefully as indulgence in an intoxicating drink.'

My wife sighed. I yawned again.

'I'm not clever enough to argue upon abstract questions,' she said. 'But all that you have said seems to me quite wrong.'

'How's that?' I asked, in a tone of unphilosophic irritation.

'If all that you have said is true, it would seem that the highest aim of mankind is to undo all that civilization and culture have done, and take us down to the condition of animals—ay, even lower than that, for even they can suffer.'

'Well, and suppose we arrived at the con-

dition of vegetables—trees, heather, grass—I don't see that we should lose anything worth a moment's regret. But, hold hard!' I exclaimed, waking up with a new idea that had for me the charm of originality; 'what is there to justify a belief that the condition of a tree is lower than our own? May it not be that the ultimate end of civilization is to make man as obedient to the laws of nature as the tree?'

'Gregory! Gregory!' said my wife passionately. 'Did you never love?'

I sat down because I was tired of standing. My wife was opposite to me, the light falling on her face, which had lost its colour.

'What has that to do with the argument?' I asked.

She dismissed that question with an impatient gesture. Her agitation about such a trifle made me laugh. Then, my elbow on the shelf, my chin in my hand, I turned my head and looked again at the slanting rain.

It seemed to me that it would be better for us both if she arrived at the same style of indifference as myself; we should jog on then in this comfortable way without bother.

'I suppose every man must fall in love some time or other,' said I, mumbling my words without taking my chin from my hand; 'same as he gets measles and other childish disorders. I've got through mine, and am not likely to be attacked again, thank goodness!'

'You were happy then?' she said eagerly.

'M'yes—sort of. One day mad with joy; next day mad with despair—hope one moment, fear the next—delirious always. Balancing insane delight against insane wretchedness, the result, I suppose, left me something to the credit of happiness.'

'But you were happier then than you are now—think—answer me truly;' and then, as I made no reply, she added impetuously: '*Do* answer me.'

'I'm thinking it over. It's difficult to answer in a moment about feelings that are past. I know this, though: I wouldn't change my present condition for that.'

'You would not?'

'No; not for the world,' said I.

'Then you never loved!' she said in a voice that trembled with sorrowful emotion.

'Never loved!' I exclaimed, as all that I had endured through my passion flashed upon me. 'Never loved! I have loved as a man only can love who has loved but one. I've heard that when a disease lays hold of a strong, healthy man, the danger is greater than when it seizes a feeble man who has got through a dozen petty maladies. That's why I took it so badly. Never loved!—why, I gave my life for the woman I loved. That isn't much, you may say: a man's life is worth so little. You may calculate its value in pounds, shillings, and pence—by the sum a suicide has lost on a horse race. A man will

put an end to his life for the silliest trifle. But,' I added, growing fierce with my recollection of the past, 'it's not a trifle that leads him to murder a woman. I never heard of a man killing a woman because he had lost a wager or robbed an employer. A man must be mad with passion to do murder.'

'Why do you talk of murder?' asked my wife, quaking with horror.

'Because I cannot think of my love and forget its effect. I tell you it brought me to that pitch. It made me a murderer at heart. I only needed the opportunity to be a murderer in deed. I would have killed the woman I loved.'

'The woman you hated!' said my wife in correction.

'I know what I say, and I tell you it was the last convulsion of love. That was long ago—I had time in prison to get over it. A gaol's good for that. A man gets the nonsense knocked out of him there; his sensi-

bilities are stamped under foot till he's callous to pain or pleasure—like a tiresome tooth when the nerve is destroyed. How could he live on and on otherwise ?'

I glanced at my wife as I put the question. A single tear dropped from her cheek for reply. She must have seen that I told the truth, for I turned again to look out of the window, unmoved by her sympathy—occupied solely with my own reflections.

'But an attack of that kind leaves its trace behind,' I went on after a pause. 'It affected my brain long after it had ceased to ravage my heart. They ought to have sent me to a madhouse instead of keeping me there. Perhaps they did not see that I was mad ; I didn't, till I got away from the punishment cell, the crank, and the irons that stimulated my mania. But I was mad. Oh, you'd admit it if you knew all. Never mind that—it's all over now ; and I'm healthier and better than ever I was.'

'Better?'

'Why, yes. I tell you I would have murdered the woman I loved; well, now I would not walk across the room to do her an injury. Isn't that an improvement?'

My wife shook her head sorrowfully, her chin falling upon her breast.

'And this is the secret of my mercy,' I added: 'I've no more love for her than I have for that dog.'

'Oh, it will come back again!' Hebe cried suddenly, as hope reanimated her. 'Just as the buds burst on the trees when the winter is quite gone, love will come back to your heart.'

'There's plenty of room for it,' said I, with a hard laugh; 'for there's nothing left of my heart but the shell.'

* * * * *

This itch of philosophizing took hold of me, and as the weather about this time kept me indoors, where I had no mechanical occupation for the moment, I indulged it pretty

freely at my wife's expense. Remembering her suggestion, I bought a novel for her—Thackeray's 'Esmond.'

'Will you read me a chapter, Gregory, while I work?' she asked, thinking, perhaps, to wean me from the 'Encyclopædia' and humanize me.

My absurd vanity led me into the trap, but without the anticipated effect.

'That's true!' I exclaimed, closing the book at the end of the first chapter. 'This man lays bare the secrets which novelists and law-makers shut their eyes to.'

'I am afraid I do not quite understand.'

I opened the book again and read the conclusion of the chapter.

'"I look into my heart and think that I am as good as any Lord Mayor, and know I am as bad as Tyburn Jack. Give me a chain and red gown and a pudding before me, and I could play the part of Alderman very well, and sentence Jack after dinner. Starve me,

keep me from books and honest people, educate me to love vice, gin, and pleasure, and put me on Hounslow Heath with a purse before me, and I will take it."'

'And what conclusion do you draw from that?' she asked diffidently.

'That we are one and all mere creatures of circumstance; and that to reward one man for his virtues is just as unjust as to punish another for his vices.'

'Oh, I am sure he did not mean that. You will find, as you read on, that Thackeray loved the good and hated the bad.'

'Then he was inconsistent, and there's no sincerity in his philosophy.'

'I would rather his philosophy were faulty than his heart.'

'It's more likely to be the other way about. Guided by reason, one can't go wrong; led by feeling, one can only by chance go right. Why should a man be hated for vices that are the result of conditions for which he is not

responsible? You might as reasonably hate him for being born; he is not to blame for either.'

My wife laid her work upon her lap, fixed her eyes upon me while she collected her thoughts, and then, in a low, earnest tone, said:

'Suppose that I sanctioned the course that sent my husband to prison, knowing that another course would save him?'

I nodded, and she continued, with an effort: 'Suppose that after that I—I——' she stopped short.

'I know,' said I, with a laugh. 'Suppose you were not true to him? All right; I can suppose that.'

'Then, would you not hate me? Should I not deserve all your hatred?'

'Not a bit of it,' said I, unmoved. 'All that is simply the result of education and temperament. You had been taught to love ease and luxury and the flattery of society.

You thought you could not live as the acknowledged wife of a condemned convict. You considered that before the twenty years expired, to which your husband was bound to be condemned, either he or you would be dead. And then afterwards——'

'Oh, don't go any further!' she cried.

'Very good. There's nothing in your conduct that I myself should not have done had I been in your place, under similar conditions and circumstances.'

She looked at me in silent wonder and pain.

'That must be the judgment of any dispassionate mind,' I continued. 'It proves what I said, that a man cannot be unjust if he is guided by reason. But I would not answer for myself if I were under the domination of emotions. I couldn't be lenient, even if I had any feeling for you—oh, I know the madness that comes with love!'

'And others—partners in my crime—could you forgive them as readily?'

'You mean Major Cleveden—I know the whole story. You ask if I should not hate him. No—if I were in the position we are supposing for the sake of argument, and I were to meet him to-morrow on the moor, I should let him pass without a curse.'

It was true. I felt as I walked up and down, thinking the matter over, that, taking all the circumstances into consideration, it would have been a terrible thing for both of us if I had retained any love for my wife. Our present condition was the most pleasant I could imagine: it was endurable to my wife; and, convinced that it could only exist with a philosophical state of apathy on my side, I resolved to keep my real feelings under subjection to the end.

I might as well have ordered the sun never to rise again, in order that I should sleep in endless night.

CHAPTER XL.

ANOTHER PHASE.

It must have been about three weeks after the foregoing discussion that, glancing down the list of household requirements Hebe had made for me to take with me into town, I found at the bottom this item :

'A little quinine.'

'What's this?' I asked. 'What sort of delicacy requires this ingredient?'

'I don't feel very strong,' she explained, in a tone of dejection.

I had been so engrossed in making myself a forge out in the shed, and setting up a bench there, that I had not remarked any change in my wife's condition. Indeed, her

undeviating gentleness had lulled me into such a feeling of content and security that I paid less attention to her than ever.

'I've noticed nothing,' said I, looking at her in astonishment.

'I am glad of that.' Her voice quivered a little. I could see now that her face lacked the brightness I had noticed when she told me with buoyancy that she felt stronger than for years before. She must have gone gradually back little by little in slight degrees for the alteration to be imperceptible, even though my thoughts were otherwise engaged.

'You would have noticed,' she went on with the slightest accent of bitterness, 'if I had failed to supply your wants.' Then her lips quivered, and she dropped her head to conceal the rising tears, as she added: 'I can't keep up my spirits as I used.'

I turned away, fearing there was going to be a scene—irritated that she could not go on just the same as I did. She had her

work and her books ; and, besides that, there were the dog and the fowls and the household things to amuse her. What else could she want?

'What made you think of quinine?' I asked.

'It did me a little good when I first came to Torquay. Dr. Borrington advised it.'

'Dr. Borrington is the doctor at Torquay?'

'Yes. I thought it might bring back my strength. It is dreadful to feel so tired.'

I went out and saddled the pony.

'You had better not sit up for me,' said I, returning to the cottage before starting. 'I may be late before I come in.'

'But you may want something.' She spoke almost hopefully.

'Oh, if I want anything I can get it myself. I don't want to be waited on.'

'No,' she said mournfully. 'You could do as well without me as with me, couldn't you?'

I hadn't the grace to protest against this. In my conceit, perhaps, I thought I might find just as much satisfaction in solitude.

'Any way, you go to bed when you feel tired,' said I.

Instead of going to Tavistock I went to Torquay. More than once on the way I looked at that last line on the list—'a little quinine'—and each time with growing uneasiness, though I did not perceive its pathetic significance then as I do now. I merely considered the personal inconvenience I should be put to if my wife really fell ill and I lost her services.

At Torquay I found Dr. Borrington, a keen, dark-eyed, sallow man, with an irritable manner. He glanced at me and then at his watch, as if he were in a hurry to get the interview over and pocket his fee.

I told him my wife was ailing. He questioned me closely, and with increasing sharpness as my answers revealed, not only my

wife's condition, but my own character. What I did not tell him he divined, and so justly that it seemed to me he must know who my wife was and all her history.

'Your wife is a delicate, sensitive woman?' he said, taking confirmation from my face. 'A young woman—affectionate disposition—fond of her children, cats, dogs, and living things? Patient, painstaking—doesn't bother you with her troubles—keeps them to herself? Had a mental strain at some time? Suffered a good deal of unhappiness? Stops at home—doesn't see many friends? No change of scene—no amusements outside her home?' He paused a moment, and went on again: 'You say she subsists almost exclusively on a milk diet—been under medical treatment already—that diet was prescribed? Anything else?'

'She took quinine.'

'Before the milk diet was resorted to.' He sat down and began to write, still ques-

tioning: 'No cough—complains of nothing but feeling tired and low-spirited? You find her crying without cause? Of course you do your best to cheer her?'

'I have my occupations,' said I.

He stopped writing, and said:

'You are more concerned about them than the life of your wife.'

'What's the matter with her?' I asked, startled by this suggestion.

'A complaint that's only too common,' he said, finishing the prescription. 'Your wife is suffering from'—he handed me the paper—'a careless husband.'

He struck the gong. I could find nothing to say as I put my fingers in my waistcoat-pocket for a sovereign.

'I don't want your money,' he said. 'If the medicine fails to do good to your wife, let the poor soul come to me.'

I covered my retreat with the boldest face I could assume, and with growing discomfort

took the prescription to the chemist whose address was on the paper.

'What should you say was the matter with the patient?' I asked, as he finished reading the prescription.

'Weak digestion.'

'Well, that's not very serious.'

'Oh, that's your opinion, is it?' he asked, regarding me over the top of his glasses. My look and manner seemed to offend him not less than it did the doctor. He put a paper-weight on the prescription, and turned to take down a bottle. Measuring some liquid in a glass, his back turned to me, he resumed:

'If you had a lamp, and for some reason or other the wick ceased to convey the oil properly, should you be greatly surprised if you were left in the dark?'

I could find no reply. The parable struck me with startling force; the conclusion stupefied me.

The living-room was empty when I returned. Closing the door as noiselessly as I had opened it, I stood for some minutes there with my hand on the latch, looking around me in dull depression. There was no sound but the low grumbling of the dog, who, coiled up on the landing above, kept a jealous eye on me. My supper was laid on the table ; my chair placed ; a glass of flowers set where the light of the lamp fell. My slippers were by the stove ; a chamber candle with a box of matches stood ready on the dresser. She had forgotten nothing.

For weeks she had never failed to open the door to me on my return, to take the parcels from my hands, to open them one after the other with smiling interest when she was assured that I had all that I wanted on the table, and to draw me into conversation about my purchases as I ate and drank. I had never perceived that it was a pleasure to talk and to listen to her, taking it as a matter of

course, and part of that contented state of mind that I intended to maintain for the future. The difference made by her absence astonished me, and the more so when I reflected that all my physical requirements were as carefully provided for as usual. 'All the colour is gone!' I said to myself.

Every moment I hoped to hear her footstep overhead. I wanted her to come down, without knowing why. I had nothing cheerful to talk to her about, and if she were tired, it was better she should sleep on. This was the first time I had felt it incumbent on myself to make my conversation agreeable, or in any way studied what would be best for her.

Usually I returned ravenous from my journey across the moor, and attacked supper the first thing. To-night my appetite was gone, and I set about quietly putting back the things in their places on the dresser and in the cupboard, admiring everywhere the perfect neatness and order that prevailed.

Then, when the table was cleared, having as little inclination for sleep as for food, I sat down in Hebe's chair by the window, looking at the folded work on the shelf and the things she had been using during the day. The work was a curtain for the window of my new room. In her work-basket was a bodkin of my inventing; I hadn't been able to make it work, but it was there amongst her treasures.

I thought about looking into the 'Encyclopædia' to see what it said on the subject of 'Decline,' but my courage failed; and at last, finding my spirits sinking lower and lower, I got up, lit my candle, and blew out the lamp. At the door leading into my new room I turned and glanced back. Howler had ceased to growl. There was not a sound. The room looked emptier than ever in the feeble light I held; the shadows on the wall were phantoms; the flowers on the table seemed dead now the lamp was out.

'If it were always like that!' I said to myself in awe.

In the morning I remembered that I had of late forgotten to fetch the water. It was a relief to think that she might not have felt tired without cause. I had the kettle boiling, the room dusted, and the breakfast-things on the table before she came down. I was standing outside, undecided what to do next, when Howler bundled down the steps, and set up a regular howl of delight at the bottom. Hebe was looking at the table in astonishment when I went in; but her amazement was greater still when I held out my hand with a bashful awkwardness, and hoped she felt better. It was the first time since the old days that I had offered my hand to her. She put hers into mine, and pressed it in silence, her eyes alone expressing that this was for her a moment of solemn presage.

Howler came up and sniffed at my legs, as though in doubt about my identity.

'I thought you might sleep late, so I got breakfast ready,' I said, withdrawing my hand, and feeling it necessary to excuse myself, lest she should give me credit for more feeling than I possessed.

At one moment, as we stood there hand in hand, a wild tenderness in her quivering lips made me fear she would throw her arms about my neck.

'Oh, I have slept too long: I didn't hear you come in. You could have made no noise at all—and thank you for asking about me: I feel much better and brighter this morning.'

She spoke hurriedly, and with agitation. But she regained her composure by the time we were seated at table.

'I've put the things in the cupboard, but I haven't turned them out of the bags. And the quinine is on the shelf.'

'I feel now as if I should not want it.'

'But you must take it, and when that's

gone I'll get more. Your hand ought not to be so thin as that.' The words slipped out involuntarily, and I hastened to cover them by adding: 'And there are some books in that parcel, and illustrated papers.'

'This is like the morning you brought the flowers home,' she said, with soft gratitude dwelling on every word.

She opened the packet, and bringing the illustrated papers to the table, drew her chair near mine, that we might look at the pictures together. It was as if she had never seen the like before. There was absorbing interest in every one; even the Prince of Wales 'laying another foundation-stone, poor fellow!' suggested a dozen ingenious comments. I should have dismissed the whole batch in five minutes; the tea was cold before she had half exhausted the fund of amusement.

'If you could make some frames, we might hang the large pictures round the room, Gregory,' she hinted—never forgetful of my

weakness, though perhaps giving it another name.

I promised to make frames of an entirely original kind.

'And why did you buy these?' she asked, without raising her eyes from the paper, but with an earnestness that she could scarcely conceal.

'I thought it would cheer you up a bit when I am occupied with things that make me forget you, you know. It struck me that things weren't exactly balanced as they should be. My work is a pleasure: yours is a duty; and you ought to have something to interest and amuse you, just as I have: that's only just; and unless things are just, we can't go on contentedly.'

'Was that the only reason?' she asked without changing her tone, without raising her eyes—'to make me content?'

I don't remember what response I made; it was scarcely intelligible to myself, I know.

'Tap'—a tear fell on the paper—'tap'—'tap.'

'Are you thinking about your children?' I asked, not harshly.

She shook her head.

It was not her tears that moved me; only the thought of being left alone in the world that pushed me on to an extremity.

'If we could manage it somehow,' I said, 'you could go and see them.'

'No,' she said, closing the paper, and hurriedly drying her eyes. 'No; they are well cared for, I know. My place is here. I will wait so long as there is any hope of finding my husband.'

CHAPTER XLI.

A NEW OPENING.

'SHE must be in a low state of health indeed, to shed tears like that for nothing at all,' I said to myself, going out to my work.

But the explanation did not satisfy me. I could not dismiss the subject from my thoughts. Those three tears kept fresh in my memory all day, while a conviction grew that they had not been shed for nothing at all.

Hebe was quite herself again at dinner-time. She was bright and cheerful all the evening. It was I who had to exert myself to appear at my ease.

When the hour came to separate for the night, I expected she would give me her hand

after my advance in the morning; but she took the candle I had lit for her in her right hand, holding a book in her left.

'Well, one of us must,' thought I; 'it's ridiculous after shaking hands in the morning to part at night as if we had fallen out since.'

So, as I said 'Good-night,' I held out my hand.

'Good-night, Gregory,' she replied, looking straight in my face, and disregarding my offered hand.

'There's some meaning in this,' I said to myself, when she was gone. 'I must think it out like a mechanical problem, or there'll be no going to sleep to-night.'

I sat down with my elbows on the table and my face in my hands, glaring at the pattern on the lamp—just as my habit was when some plan of communicated motion was in question.

'When I offered my hand this morning,' thought I, 'and said I hoped she felt better

or something of that kind, she gave me hers, and clasped mine tight. Her soft fingers quite clung to my hand. I can almost feel that clasp now; and she looked as if she could hug me. Then she was as pleased as a child about the pictures; said they reminded her of the morning when I brought her the flowers: that was a happy day for her. Suddenly, in the midst of her pleasure, she asks why I had brought her the books, and when I let out the truth she begins to cry. What next? I as good as offered to let her go to her children, and she refused, saying that her place was here while there was any hope of finding her husband. After that she goes on in the old way, just as if nothing had happened, until now, when she declines to accept my hand, and says "Good-night, Gregory," with the air of a princess. Oh, she saw my hand clearly enough! It was not without a purpose that she refused it. There was a heap of meaning in that wonderful face of hers; she put a

stress upon "Gregory." These are the facts; now what do they signify?'

The ideas simmered awhile in my mind, and settling down, left the extract clear enough.

'Good heavens!' I gasped; 'she knows that I am her husband!'

I might have found it out a month before if I had given myself the trouble to think about it.

With this key I found an explanation of all that had puzzled me hitherto.

'She knows I am her husband,' I continued, following up my discovery, 'and is prepared to acknowledge me when I attain to that standard which shall entitle me to such a wife. Well, that's pretty good, too, considering what sort of a wife she's been to me. However, I'm content to let bygones be bygones; though it's pretty cool of her to take it as a right. If she wants to wipe out old scores and start afresh, I'm willing. It's the best thing we can do, perhaps, to ignore the past. It's the

present we have to make the best of. It's clear that she expects me to have a certain amount of affection for her. She is not content with a neutral condition in which there is neither love nor hate. She hopes to revive in my heart a feeling of disinterested love; that explains her submission, her patience, her untiring efforts to make my life better and happier. When I brought her those flowers, she thought my heart was touched; when I showed her that I had no heart to touch, her courage failed, but her hope was not quite dead. It revived this morning when I gave her my hand. It languished again when she learnt that I was concerned for myself and not for her. That's it: when I love her she will acknowledge me as her husband. Until then I am to be nothing but Gregory. She is ready to throw herself into the arms of one: she refuses her hand to the other. And yet she stoops without hesitation to do the work of a domestic servant. That's something like pride.'

How would it be, I wondered, if I threw off all disguise, and told her that I was not Gregory, but Kit Wyndham, her husband? I could not see any advantage to be gained by that. It would simply precipitate the catastrophe I wished to avoid. All I wanted was that we should jog along amicably together, with the hope that in time my wife would reconcile herself to the inevitable, and settle down, satisfied with a rational state of companionship, without any stuff and nonsense of love. That seemed to me reasonable and right. Many couples after being married eleven years would be glad to be no worse off than that, and very few after such a term bother themselves or their husbands with sentimental rubbish. A man with the best disposition in the world can't give what he has not got; and examining my feelings, I found none that could be called love, or anything like it.

I settled in the end that it would be best to

let things take their course, and say nothing to disturb my wife; but, on the contrary, to do all that I could to make her satisfied with her lot.

One morning Hebe found me, seated outside the shed I had fitted up as a workshop, doing nothing. Her exclamation of surprise at this unusual spectacle fell in a cadence of anxiety as I raised my gloomy face.

I was glad to see her; her very presence was helpful. I had come to respect her judgment even in those matters—mechanics, for instance—which were least within her grasp. She was so clear-sighted, so tolerant, so quick to perceive hopeful possibilities. I gave the bench a flick with my apron and made room for her.

'What has happened?' she asked lowly, sitting down beside me.

'Nothing. I can't get on: that's all.'

Looking into the workshop for an explana-

tion, she fixed her eyes on the forge, and said :

'Won't the anvil work?'

'That's all right.'

She paused a moment, and then, with a fearful presentiment, exclaimed :

'Oh, I forgot the rivets!'

'No, you didn't. They're there. You put 'em down on the list all right. I've got everything. There's the copper cut out all ready to rivet, tube, valves—all.'

'The water can't help coming up when you turn out the lamp, can it?'

'Oh, no! The thing is bound to act. I'm sure of that.'

'Then why can't you get on?'

'I don't know. I've been growing sluggish for the past fortnight—losing interest in the thing ; and just now, when I had my apron on, my sleeves tucked up, and all ready to begin, a feeling of disgust for the whole thing came over me that I hadn't

the strength to overcome. I can't explain it.'

'I can,' she exclaimed, with a flash of triumph in her eyes, and a smile mantling brightly in her face. 'It's work for a blacksmith ; not for you!'

Oh, it was fine—the scorn in her voice as she uttered that word 'blacksmith'—the scorn in her delicate nostril, on her curved lip, its bloom beaded with moisture—in her clear, deep eyes, in the dark curve of her bent brows. I smiled, partly with amusement, but more with admiration of that face, which had never before seemed so beautiful. Then, as her brows rose, and the whole expression of her countenance relaxed from severity to tender pride, another sentiment for which I cannot find a name thrilled in my veins : it may have been nothing but gratified vanity.

'A blacksmith is as respectable as a carpenter or a mason,' said I ; 'and you didn't

find me too good to build the room over there.'

'It's good to do all that—to be a mason, a carpenter, a blacksmith—anything if you can do nothing better; but look,' she said, laying her hand on my bare arm, I think involuntarily, 'you wouldn't have a great man like Tennyson cease to form grand conceptions and put them into noble and beautiful words in order that he might make his poems up into books, doing work that a clever printer could perhaps do better.'

'That's very good reasoning,' said I. 'But if we could get that water up without traipsing through the wet heather——'

'Why shouldn't we?' she interrupted. 'To save us so much inconvenience is worth a certain sum, and if a blacksmith will carry out your idea for that sum it is worth while giving it to a blacksmith to do. And surely we can afford it. There is all that money in

my box we have got for the butter; and if that's not enough, there are my rings.'

The shillings in that box were dear to her. In her mind, I believe, it represented subsistence for the future. Yet she was willing to give it all up for this purpose. I must have had a soul of adamant not to be touched by such self-sacrifice and devotion.

'That's true,' said I. 'I'll give it to a blacksmith, I think. But I must do something.'

'If there were no better occupation, do you think I should have suggested abandoning this?' she asked, taking her hand from my arm.

'No—unless——' I stopped, surprised to find myself about to be playful.

'Unless what?'

'Unless you thought that the blacksmith would forget all about you as the mason did.'

She smiled and bent forward, her hands folded on her knees, and I saw the colour

rise to the angle of her ear, where a silky little curl strayed from her waved hair. She shook her head.

'I don't fear that,' she said. 'You have never let me fetch the wood and water since.'

'Well, what shall I do?' I asked, after watching her sidelong in silent wonder a little.

'Invent! invent!' She raised her head quickly, and spoke with animation. 'That is more than a common blacksmith can do. You have a head.'

'And hands as well—and they object to idleness.'

'Then why shouldn't you employ them in working out some fine design—some work of art in which hand and head would work together?'

She struck the note I had in vain been trying to find. The old love of beauty had been awakened in me through watching her. It was that which had made the hard lines

of mechanics distasteful to me, and had excited an indefinite yearning which the compass and the rule failed to satisfy. Her suggestion turned my thoughts at once to wood carving, conveying the idea that was in her own mind.

'I'll think about it,' said I, rising. 'Perhaps I'll get a lathe.'

But going presently into the workshop to put away the abandoned sheets of metal, my eye was caught by a shining thread of copper, curled in a delicate spiral by the action of the shears in trimming the edge of a sheet. That conveyed a new scheme to my mind, and a whole train of ideas, which occupied my thoughts until Howler, barking a rhapsody, intimated that dinner was being put on the table.

'Have you been thinking about it?' asked Hebe, as I entered.

'Yes. You were quite right. It isn't the first time I've thought so.' She had a

loaf in her hands, but her look and mien as she acknowledged the compliment were worthy of a princess. 'I think I see my way to using head and hand together.'

'Oh, I'm so glad. Tell me about it.' She set down the loaf, and came eagerly to my side as I seated myself, taking no notice of the pot that was boiling over.

I rose and took it off the fire, saying we would talk about it over dinner. But she would have it that the dinner would be better for waiting till I had satisfied her curiosity, and then, when I sat down again, she drew a chair beside me, and asked what it was I held so carefully in my hand.

'They're copper shavings,' said I. 'Look at them; aren't they beautiful?'

'I dare say they are more beautiful to an artist's eye than they are to mine.'

'If you saw this long one mounted on a stem with a vine leaf beside it——'

'That thread being the tendril. Oh, yes, I see now! It is beautiful.'

'Or if this whorl had another smaller whorl springing the reverse way with a conventional flower bud projecting between——'

'Yes, yes,' she said eagerly; 'I understand now. It never occurred to me what it was in a scroll that pleased me. Perhaps it was the conventional flower bud.'

'Why should a flower bud please beyond everything else in nature?'

'Does it?'

'As a matter of fact I should say, no. But you see nothing but flowers and foliage used in ornament—if you except an occasional bird's claw or beast's leg. I believe new forms and finer combinations are to be got by studying new models, and the model of models should be the human form.'

Hebe, looking at me in something like awe, asked in her low, sweet voice:

'What made you think of that?'

'Why, that little curl over your temple—see, here it is in this thread; and that one is the tiny ringlet at the nape of your neck.'

Her cheek flushed, and her eyes twinkled—she was as prettily confused as a young girl listening for the first time to a lover's whisper. It was the awakening enthusiasm of an artist that stirred me, and nothing else.

'It is beautiful any way you look at it,' I said, holding one of the shavings up in the light; 'the surface is tarnished and dark, but the cut edge is bright, just like your hair in the sun.'

She drew her head near mine to see it from the same point of view.

'Oh, but that's nothing to the lines I see in your face,' I continued, catching the curve of her eyelash, the undulating line of her nose, the turn of her lips, and the bold sweep of her chin as I glanced at her profile.

She drew back with a little cry of delight, and waited in silence for further explanation.

Then I laid out my design, which was nothing more romantic or extraordinary than to work up slips of metal into ornamental candelabra, flower-holders, and the like; but had I been telling a wondrous fairy-story to a child, I should not have found a more eager listener.

Here for her was an opening through which it seemed she caught a glimpse of heaven; and though other rifts had closed up, leaving nothing but a leaden, dreary outlook, her hope revived with steadfast confidence in a future where every cloud should be swept away, and her sun shine out glorious.

And so I talked on, and she listened, and we forgot our dinner until it was spoilt; and then even she who had prepared it could not find it in her heart to murmur a regret.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SIMPLE FAITH OF WOMAN.

We were both prodigiously excited over this new scheme. I believe Hebe was just as impatient as I to make a beginning.

I remember that the wind sprang up after dinner, bringing gusts of rain; the tors were hidden in clouds, and it felt raw and chill outside. When I went in for the third time to see if tea was ready, Hebe said:

'We shall have to light the lamp for tea before long.'

'We'll have it to-day,' said I; 'it won't matter how long the evenings are now.'

As soon as she had gone to her room to dress for the evening, I closed the shutters to

shut out the gloomy sky. The rain pelted viciously against the window, but the sound of it was drowned by the singing of the kettle on the stove. The light from the fire fell on the tea-things and white cloth, and spread a glow over the room that aroused a feeling of satisfaction and comfort within me, which put my boasted state of passive content to shame. It looked so genial that I refrained from lighting the lamp, that Hebe might share my pleasure. Going out for some fuel to stack under the stove for the evening, I caught sight of Howler standing at the end of his chain and shivering. He had been asleep in his kennel all day, and seemed to have come out for the express purpose of breaking the monotony with a little positive suffering. He yawned as I passed, having not enough spirit left to growl. I unfastened the chain from his collar, not from any feeling of pity or love for him, but with the knowledge that it would please Hebe.

Under these exceptional influences, I put on my Sunday clothes, after I had washed, almost instinctively. Hebe also seemed to feel that this was an occasion for special attention to her appearance, for she was twice as long as usual over her toilette, and came down in the new dress she had made for herself. She was delighted with the cosy aspect of our room, and seeing Howler lying on the rug in the glow of the fire, his jaw on the ground, his tail beating the floor, and the whites of his eyes showing as he looked towards her, conscious that it was quite against ordinary rules for him to be there, and fearful of the consequences, she turned to me and said:

'Oh, that is kind!'

We determined to have tea in the fire-light, and while the tea was drawing I made some toast. Howler turned over on his back while I bent over him with the fork in my hand, as if he had made up his mind to die there without a growl if I were minded to take his life.

'That's better than quinine,' I said, when Hebe took a second piece of toast.

'Do you know, I only took two or three doses just at first,' she said, 'and I shall not need the rest? Oh!' she added with an outbreak of gratitude, 'it's coming back to me—my life and strength.'

When the lamp was lit, I was struck by the prettiness and elegance of my wife's dress. It was a wonder how she had made it to fit so well without assistance.

'How is it in the back?' she asked anxiously.

'There's not a crease anywhere. It follows the beautiful line from your neck perfectly.'

She laughed, and bent down to turn up the lamp; then I noticed that, though her hair was freshly dressed, she had left astray the little curls that had moved me to admiration.

'What shall you begin with?' she asked, when I brought out my drawing-board.

'A mirror-frame,' said I. 'A beautiful face ought to be seen in a handsome setting, and this shall be for you.'

One would think I had been studying compliments, but indeed every word came to me naturally, just as rhythmical words suggest themselves when the thought is poetical.

I drew first of all a rude outline, and then, making Hebe sit opposite, I worked in the details, and elaborated them according to the idea I had conceived; and from first to last Hebe never stirred a hand's breadth, though I told her there was no necessity for maintaining a pose. She had a book before her, which she pretended to be reading at her ease; but not one page was turned.

She was full of wonder and admiration when she saw the plan finished.

'That will be very beautiful,' she said; and then, after looking at it for some moments, she asked: 'But where am I?'

'Why, everywhere! There's not a line

that isn't a faithful copy of some curve in your figure and face — some fold in your drapery.'

Then I pointed out to her one after another the particular turns I had used, to her still greater astonishment. I fancy she had a notion that the design was to be an effigy of herself in the position of Britannia, with the shield cut to let in the looking-glass.

The next morning I began to work out my design in metal; new ideas came with every step forward. Hebe found me hammering out the lead pipe I had procured for the water-engine when she came into the workshop.

'Look how well the gray lead goes with the red copper!' I cried. 'I shall work them together, and see what an admirable effect is produced by cutting through the oxidized surface. You can see how rich the combination will be, and how one will lighten the other. And that's not all—we can get body

by fluting the lead where strength is needed, and punching out certain parts in relief.'

'Will you be able to do all that before tea?' she asked.

I laughed at her.

'Why,' said I, 'it will take me weeks; there are punches to make, and dies, and drills, and a tool for riveting before I can begin.'

'Then you won't want me to sit to you to-night,' she said with a sigh.

'Not for a good fortnight,' I replied, laying a length of tube on the anvil and dinging away with my hammer.

She was disappointed. I could see that by the constraint in her manner as she made an excuse for leaving me. The sound of the hammer on the anvil must have been as hateful to her ear as it was pleasant to mine. She had reason to look with a jealous eye on mechanics as a distraction dangerous to her own influence. Nevertheless, she came back to me

soon after, with not a sign of ill-will in her face, to tell me that she had cleared the dresser and arranged it so that I could go on cutting out my 'punches and things' in the evening.

The metal-working fever lasted just as long as there were technical difficulties to be overcome; when there were no further calls upon my inventive ingenuity, I tired of it. The look of Hebe disgusted me with the state of my own hands, begrimed with metal, and set off with a thumbstall and a finger-rag. Going from the living room, with its perfect neatness, and a sweet smell of new bread, to the littered workshop, the rank odour of lead and copper sickened me. It was a relief to go out into the open and have a look at the clouds. They are always beautiful, and if of the cumulus kind, you can invariably find a likeness to the face in your mind. I found Hebe's. For one moment it was exactly like her. It only needed a sunset flush to

be perfect in colour as well as form. When it lost shape, an inclination to go back and look at the real face became irresistible, and I glanced at the dirty bench.

I had some intention of asking if I had left my calipers on the dresser when I went in, but the open frankness of Hebe's face shamed me from the mean excuse.

'You haven't hammered your finger again?' she asked, with sudden anxiety.

'No; I've only come in to sit down in the clean,' I said; and then I confessed my disinclination to work.

She could not quite conceal her triumph, though she did her best to subdue the smile on her face and still the twinkling of her pretty eye.

'It's a queer thing I can't go on,' said I, to hide my mortification.

'But you can go on!' she exclaimed; 'and the strange thing would be if you could stand still. And it is standing still

to labour at anything that ceases to please you, for you may be sure that then it ceases to be a work of invention and worthy of you.'

This reasoning pleased me hugely, and raised the high opinion I already had of my wife's judgment and understanding.

'Tell me,' she continued, 'have you left any difficulty unmastered?'

'No. A boy might put the thing together now.'

'There!' she cried. 'Did not I say so? Are *you* to do a boy's work? Only when it pleases you to play. Set the pieces aside for the occupation of idle moments, and give yourself to drawing new designs—if you can use a pencil with that poor finger.'

'I'll have a go at it to-night,' said I joyfully. 'I've been itching to sharpen a pencil since Sunday, but I really hadn't the courage.'

'What did you fear—not me?'

I said nothing, not knowing how to attribute the want of courage to anything else.

'Have I shown want of faith in you?' she asked, in tender reproach, quickly seizing this first sign of humility on my side as an occasion for nearer approach.

I got up, feeling that this subject of faith was the one of all others to be avoided if we were to go on pleasantly. She turned the theme at once.

'Oh, I knew you would come back to me!' she exclaimed fervently. 'I knew you would not go back to an occupation that shut me out from you.'

'How did you know that?'

'Because God is so good to us!' she said, in a tone of trembling awe, as though she felt the Divine presence; 'so good to us that in the darkest hour we may be sure the light is coming. Everything grows and moves onwards, doesn't it? Nothing stands still—unchanged; and in every change there is

some good, if we have but patience to wait for it. Oh, I am so sure of it that all the happiness of the past I would not take again in exchange for that that is to come.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

MY WIFE'S CONFESSIONS.

A LOVING woman has need of someone to confide in—a mother or a husband. My wife had neither, for I was still but 'Gregory' to her; and so she wrote down her hopes and fears in the end page of the book I had given her to keep her accounts in, adding her little memoranda of events. Her confidence was made in secret. I had no knowledge that she kept a diary until I found the book, with faded flowers between the leaves, which doubtless had some memories for her, on the bookshelf by her bed when she slept there no more.

'I am so happy! He has found a new

pleasure in life,' she wrote under October 5. 'And one that must bring us nearer together. He told me I might read to him when he sat down to draw. I chose "Vanity Fair," as being a man's book. After I had been reading about an hour I saw that he had his arms crossed on the drawing-board and was looking most earnestly at me. However, I did not take any notice of that. After a good long while he took up his pencil again, but instead of going on with what I think he calls elevations, he dropped his hands in his pockets, and leaned back in the chair, still looking intently at me from under his fine dark brows.

'"Shall I go on with this, or would you like me to read something else?" I asked him.

'"It's all the same to me," he replied; "I couldn't tell you a single word of what you've been reading."

'I was a little disappointed to hear him

say this, because I had been trying to read distinctly and with expression, and had flattered myself that he was interested in it.

'"I've been listening to the music of it," he added, making my heart bound. "It is astonishing. One would think I had never before heard the sound of a human voice."

'"You have heard me sing sometimes," I said. Indeed, quite unconsciously, I do sing a little in the morning now.

'"Yes," said he, "just as I saw your face here for weeks and weeks before I found out the delight there was in studying its beauty."

I expect I coloured up at this; I know I felt the blood tingling all through my veins.

'"My senses are waking up," he cried, rising in excitement. "I couldn't smell, or feel, or see, or hear a month ago — only taste like the meanest animal. Now when I come in the room I detect sweet smells;

when I dip my hands in the stream and feel the fresh breeze on my face it gets into my head like a passion." Then with a laugh he added: "I shan't be able to draw soon when I look at you, or understand what you say when I hear your voice."

'No wonder my hand shakes to-night. Thank Heaven for this!

'Oct. 6.—He sang this morning for the first time. He has tried before, but there was no tune. It was "Rock of Ages," that we used to sing at Feltenham in the old time to the tune of "Batti batti" from *Don Giovanni*, when he was in the choir. I can't describe the emotion that swelled my heart when I heard that. His voice is not as it used to be: one could not expect that after being unused for eleven long years; but it sounded to my ears, though he sang so faintly, like some angel from heaven singing a promise of endless joy. This is one more of the many signs that give me life and

strength. In all things he is showing an advance in delicacy and refinement — a growing distaste for the work and pleasures that are rude and coarse. Only a little while ago his voice was harsh and grating like those horrible men in the streets of London who sell newspapers.

'It is very seldom now that he suffers a coarse expression to escape him, and when he sees that it shocks me, he becomes silent and seems angry with himself. This alteration is wonderful to me, when I think of the companions he has had so long in that terrible prison, and the debasing influence of his surroundings. And what a good, hopeful sign it is that he can exercise this self-restraint and correct himself so soon of those habits which have been growing upon him so long!'

A few days later she wrote:

'I turned my ankle to-day coming up from the brook. It was nothing, but it

made me feel faint for the moment. He took my arm, and with that support—so firm and yet very tender—I got into the cottage quite easily. Indeed, I felt nothing except that it was good to be supported that way by one you love. But when we sat down I saw he was quite white, and his hand shook worse than mine. He has not touched me, nor I him (except once) since the day he brought me the flowers. Oh! I know he is beginning to love me again, at last. And to think I have almost despaired at times, and lost heart, thinking he could never change — never get over the awful suffering.

'Oct. 30.—I was too happy yesterday; to-day it has been an effort to appear cheerful. He did not ask me if my foot were better this morning; I think he forgot that I suffered last night. I have never heard him express any feeling of pity or sympathy; and that makes me think his love—if, in-

deed, he is beginning to love me—is all selfish. One must suffer to love truly ; one's tenderness and clinging affection seem to me to spring out of sorrow. Oh that he loved me in that way! But can I wish that he should have sorrow who has endured so much? No, no. The real love will come in time ; it is childish and unreasonable to be so impatient. All changes in Nature are slow. Nothing is lasting that is forced quickly to its end. One sees how slowly the buds unfold in the spring: how hard it is for those tender shoots to burst the tough bark, hardened and bound by the cruel, pitiless storms of the winter ; and then how slowly one part develops and then another ; and long, long after the first leaves have uncurled the flower opens and the fruit comes. And see how the poor things suffer that come forward before their time—thrown back altogether, sometimes beyond recovery. And have I any right to feel impatient, or

dissatisfied with my husband's progress? His winter has lasted eleven years; the spring has but just come. I write this and feel that I ought to rejoice; yet I am unhappy to-night still.

Nov. 3.—I know he touched my hair with his lips when he passed behind me this evening. He thought I could not feel so light a touch. I can tell when he is thinking of me, even when his eyes are not upon me: but how I can tell I do not know. I thought when he lit my candle he would offer me his hand in saying "good-night," as he did before; his eyes seemed to burn me so that I felt confused and helpless. I think if he had held out his hand I must have taken it, for my heart was full of love and trust, and I could not doubt that he loved me, and I was too fluttered to think about right and wrong, though at the bottom of my conscience there was a little voice that said "No." But he let me go, dropping his

hand by his side, and now I am glad ; for surely the time has not come if he does not think so. And this restraint on his part is a better sign than anything ; for it shows his ear is not deaf to the voice of conscience, so that I may safely believe that his moral sense has awoke, just as the physical sense of hearing music did last month.

'I had a dreadful dream last night' (writing the next day) : 'I thought I saw my dear little girl lying in bed, and when I turned back her curly head her eyes were open and glazed, and she was dead. I do not think I am foolish enough to believe in dreams, and I know she is as tenderly guarded by Helen as though I were with her. But I could not get the dream out of my mind, though I did my best not to think of it, and to devote myself to my husband's happiness. All day the impression has been on my mind though, and, longing to confess all to my husband, I tried to turn the conversation that

way after dinner. But he stopped me at once. "For mercy's sake," he said passionately, "never say a word about the past! I could have listened to what you chose to say, and kept a cool head and a callous heart, a couple of months ago. I can't now. I can't understand myself; either I am becoming a fiend again *or a man.*" This frightened me, and I said no more. Yet now I wish I had told him all. My heart aches with this secret and the thought of my little girl to-night."

The following day:

'What a weak thing I am! When my heart sinks a little, or rises a little, my self-control goes at once. Last night I regretted that I had not told him all. Now I see how ill-timed it would have been.

'He was turning over the pages of one of the big books with an impatient smile for those subjects which so absorbed him when his mind was occupied with mechanics, to-

night, when he came upon the subject of Phrenology. We looked at it together. It is cheering to sit beside him and listen to his explanation of difficult subjects.

'"It would seem," said he, "as if the pressure that rendered certain faculties of mine insensible whilst I was under punishment were being gradually removed—these, for example." He pointed out some of the intellectual bumps.

'"And there, too," I said, pointing to those that related to the affections.

'"Not yet," he said, shaking his head; "reverence—veneration—benevolence; I've none of them. If there is a bump to represent disinterested affection, you'll find its place marked on my head by an indentation."

'"But you love certain things—art," I suggested.

'"That's not love," he repeated; "call it intellectual admiration—what you will, but

not love. You love with your heart: I love with my eyes. Your love would go on for ever: mine would cease the moment the flower faded."

He spoke so coldly that I cannot doubt his sincerity, and if this is so, what would have become of me in a little while if I had made him again my husband? No, I must wait patiently, in the hope that his heart may expand in the same way as his intellect. I must think how to give life and vigour to his heart. What will do it? Surely there is nothing like hope; and if I can lead him to hope, I must persevere in that direction. Is this not a reason that should strengthen me in avoiding an untimely reunion? I pray for Divine guidance with all my heart and soul, feeling my own weakness.

'November 20. — Howler ran quite ten yards after him when he went off just now to market. Oh, this is a good sign! For he himself has said that it was because he had no

love for anyone that the dog had no love for him. Well, now Howler no longer snarls at him, but follows him a little way. That proves that my husband is beginning to love. I could not help hitting the dog and putting him to the chain for coming back.

'Same day: evening.—He came back to-night, looking so handsome. He had his hair cut at Tavistock *like a gentleman;* his beard trained to a point like Vandyke's, and his fine, long moustache left to flow beautifully in its natural way. And he had a new hat as well, and in his gray suit he looked a finer, manlier, more thoughtful and noble man than ever I have seen him before. I was proud to say to myself, "He is my husband." Oh, how he has changed from that monster that crawled out from under my bed in his hideous convict dress and iron fetters only a few months ago! In every way he has changed, but in nothing more rapidly than in personal appearance. He looks now like my Kit; but even a month

ago there were moments when I doubted if he was not what he pretended to be—another man, not my husband, but with certain peculiarities resembling his.

'Tea was ready, and I had my linsey on, but seeing him so handsome, I thought it only fit that I should run up and dress my hair a little neater. I arranged it in the old way—on the top of my head; but then, finding that it did not go well with my plain dress, I put on my lace dress, and so quickly that I was down again by the time he came in from washing his hands after putting up the pony.

'He entered, drawing down his Vandyke beard in his hand, as gentlemen do in society, and came to a sudden stand, catching sight of me.

'"Why, what fairy has changed you in the last five minutes?' he cried.

'"The fairy Propriety, sir," said I, "who wouldn't have me look as if I were your servant."'

CHAPTER XLIV.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

Yes, I had fallen in love with my wife for the second time; but as she has shown better than I could, my love was without sweetness and tenderness, and wholly of the senses. I myself felt that, and my awaking conscience told me that such love was despicable.

One morning in December, when I was about to start off for Newton for a supply of household requisites, Howler came up to me, wagging the broken stump of his tail, and looking at me out of the corner of his bleared eye with uncertain friendliness.

'Take him with you,' said Hebe; 'I'm sure he will follow if you pat him.'

I had a superstitious feeling that this brute would love me when I was lovable and not before, and, to test myself and please Hebe, I bent down and patted Howler. He gave my hand a single lick in return, and turned away with a sniff, as though he could not yet quite approve the flavour of it. But having given his head a shake, he wagged his tail resolutely, as if resolved to do what was expected of him. He followed me a hundred yards, came to a stand, and turned back, his tail hanging down limp, and his ears working nervously. Hebe defied him to return; I whistled encouragingly. It was no good; after a few plaintive whines, he slunk back to Hebe, crouched, rolled over on his back with his four legs in the air when he got within arm's length of her, readier to receive the worst punishment she could inflict than to follow me.

'Never mind,' thought I as I went on; 'he has come further than ever he came before, and that is a good sign.'

A good sign of what—that I could love my wife when my eyes were not charmed with her beauty? I looked round. She was standing where I had left her. I could only see at that distance a pale spot of light, where her face stood out in relief against the dark-blue woollen wrap that enveloped her head and shoulders. Yet my heart went out towards her, and throbbed gladly with the thought of returning to her in a few hours.

'Oh! I am getting better, body and soul!' I said aloud, in joy; and with an inexpressible sentiment of longing and hope glowing within me, I trotted over the bleak moor.

I was within a couple of miles of the Newton road, when I made out in the distance a cart jolting towards me. What was the meaning of it? The track—it could not be called a road—led nowhere except to my hut, and was only traversed by me. There seemed to be two men in the cart.

It was too near the highroad to suppose

that they had lost their way; they must be coming to seek me: with what purpose? As we approached I perceived that one was a country lad; the other an old man in a silk hat. The lad might well be he who drove me and Mrs. Bates when I first went to see the cottage; the old man's appearance was hardly less familiar to me, though I could not make out quite where I had seen him before. Their regard showed that they were equally uncertain about me, and anxious to know who I was. We stopped by mutual accord when we met.

'Be you the gent, sir, as I drove over along of Mrs. Bates?' asked the lad.

But before the question was put I had recognised the old man, and he me. It was old Beeton. He, too, was greatly changed, and not much for the better, albeit his face was shaved, and his dress made some pretence to respectability. His silk hat was limp in the brim, brown on the crown, and shiny with

wet brushing; his linen was dirty and frayed; the metal shone through the edges of the buttons that fastened his black frock coat, which looked all the dingier for the corner of a handkerchief displayed from the breast pocket. A pair of baggy green kid gloves and a rusty umbrella gave the finishing touch to the picture of decayed respectability. His nose was red; his lips colourless; his cheeks had the yellow hue of starvation that is seen in the faces of workhouse inmates. When he lifted his hat he discovered a bald head, touched up by a red pimple or two on the front, and fringed with a spare scattering of white hairs. There seemed to be but a couple of teeth in his head when he opened his mouth to speak.

'Good-morning—er-er—*Gregory!*' he said; 'I think we have met before.'

His eyebrows had not lost their old expressiveness, and their movement as he spoke intimated an intention not to be misunderstood.

'Yes; what do you want?' I asked.

'Well, that is hardly to be explained here. As you see, I engaged this—eh—vehicle expressly to visit you with a view to a *consultation*;' his brows underlined the word; 'and that consultation I shall be most happy to hold when we arrive at our destination.'

'I am not going home,' I began.

'Wherever you please, my dear sir. I am entirely at your disposition.'

If I could have disposed of him as I wished at that moment, he would have come prematurely to his end. A sickening forecast of evil possessed me as I looked at the old rascal; he sat with his hands folded on the knob of his umbrella regarding me with a complacent grin. But though I wished him to be anywhere rather than near me, I could not let him go without knowing his purpose in seeking me. It could be no trivial matter that had led him to hunt me up, and incur the expense of hiring the cart, which he evidently could ill afford.

'I am going into Newton; follow me if you think it is worth your while,' I said.

The lad turned the cart about, and followed me to the inn where I put up my pony. From the yard I saw the old man with the umbrella under his arm, and a worn purse in his hand, haggling with the lad over the price. He looked more disreputable, with his shabby pretence to gentility, out of the cart than he had in it. A pair of drab gaiters, intended, probably, to conceal his boots, emphasized the patches on them; his trousers of shepherd's plaid, evidently lowered to their full extent, had baggy protrusions considerably lower than his knees.

'Let us have a drink, my dear Wyndham,' he said expansively, in a low voice, when we met.

'I don't drink.'

'No? Then we will eat. Can we get anything decent here, or shall we go to the hotel?'

His manner would have led one to believe that he could afford anything.

'We will go in here.'

I led the way to the parlour. As we passed the bar, Beeton asked with a magnificent air what there was in the house, and ordered the best.

'Well,' said he, closing the door of the parlour and turning upon me; 'you are looking superb, my dear friend—the very picture of health and prosperity. That suit becomes you amazingly. Ah, how I wish I could wear tweeds and a felt hat; but, you know, in our profession we have to regard appearances.' As he spoke, he removed his dilapidated hat, and placed it on the sideboard carefully, as though a rude touch might injure its rusty nap. 'What a pleasure it is to be free from the trammels of conventionality! It agrees with you, that's certain. I declare I should not have known you in that gray suit. It must have cost you three or four guineas.'

He took the lapel between his fingers, looking at it critically. 'And you have an air of competence that the best of friends could hardly hope to find in one who went into prison without a rap, and has only been out of it half a year. And I'm told you have a little house and property all to yourself on this charming moor.'

'Do you want to know how I came by my money?'

'My dear sir!' he cried, raising his hands and his eyebrows in expostulation.

'Do you want some of it yourself? is that what you were coming over for?'

'I have never yet,' he said with excessive dignity, 'in the whole course of my professional career, taken money—except as a loan—without first rendering adequate service. If it is in my power to serve you, as I hope to do ——'

Here, the servant bringing in the lunch, he dropped that subject, and made a remark upon the state of foreign politics.

'Now,' said I, when the servant went out, 'tell me what you want.'

'Why this stiffness, my dear sir? Come, sit down, and let us talk over our affairs as we eat like a couple of old friends.'

'I am not going to eat.'

'But I ordered lunch expressly for you.'

'I will pay for it. Come to the point.'

'Your tone is offensive, sir,' he said, as he thrust three bony fingers in the breast of his shabby frock-coat, and drew himself up. 'It is not the tone in which one gentleman should speak to another.'

'Gentlemen!' said I, laughing bitterly. 'We are both ex-convicts.'

'And so are nine-tenths of mankind. The only difference I recognise between myself and the judge and jury who convicted me for embezzlement is that my offence was found out, and theirs remains to be discovered. Where is the man who can honestly say that he has not committed some fault for which he would

have been punished if Justice were not blind? Nine-tenths, did I say? We are all ex-convicts, sir.'

'Hang your philosophy!' I cried impatiently; 'will you speak to the point or not?'

'As a professional man and a friend, I must decline to enter upon the subject while your attitude leaves me in doubt whether you are hostile or simply pressed for time.'

'What does it matter whether I am either the one or the other?'

'It matters a good deal. If you are hostile, I refuse, on professional principle, to continue the consultation; if you are pressed for time, it will be my duty, as a friend, to find some occasion when you are at liberty to give me your patient attention—either calling upon you by appointment, or dropping in with the hope of finding you at leisure.'

There was no mistaking the significance of these words, pointed by a particularly subtle

depression of one eyebrow. I did not want him to come to the cottage, and he must have perceived it, as I threw myself in a chair to await his convenience. He made me a bow, and seated himself at the table, when he at once attacked the beef. I never saw a man eat more ravenously. With an appetite of that kind, and in the presence of a good lunch, it was worth a struggle to defer business for half an hour.

It gave me time for reflection, and seeing there was nothing to be got by making an enemy of the man, I answered him as civilly as I could upon the various subjects he opened in the course of eating. I felt that my present antipathy to the old man was unreasonable. He had certainly done his utmost to save me from the prison, and all he told me there had been confirmed by the Vicar, who, for that reason, was as much to be disbelieved as the lawyer.

Amongst other things, he told me that he

had heard of my 'happy release' before quitting 'her Majesty's hospitable roof'—an ex-convict invariably refers to his past sufferings in a tone of persiflage—his term expiring exactly a week after that event.

When he could eat no more, he laid down his knife with a sigh, turned his chair round so as to face me, crossed his legs, knitted his fingers on his knees with his thumbs poised one against the other, and, smiling unctuously, began:

'Now, my dear sir, that we are quite at our ease, let us approach the subject we have to discuss. On my side, there is no need for reserve, and I intend to tell you with the utmost candour what my position is, and the motives which have led me to take this position. But do not, sir, for one moment think that I expect you in return to make any statement or admission which you may consider inexpedient or damaging to your own interests.'

He coughed in self-approval, and continued:

'In the first place, I think it right to inform you that I am the authorized representative of a Private Inquiry Agency of the very highest order. By a coincidence, not less fortunate than peculiar, the first case submitted to my investigation concerned parties with whom I was already related in a professional capacity —Major Cleveden having commissioned our firm to find his wife, Mrs. Hebe Cleveden, *née* Thane, who deserted her home, her husband, and her children on the night of June 5 in the present year.'

There was nothing in this to surprise me. My stolidity evidently gave old Beeton great satisfaction, for he continued, in a more cheerful tone:

'My first impression was that you had found your wife and murdered her. You smile; but it was not a preposterous supposition on my part, knowing the state of your

mind during the past six years at Dartmoor; and I started on this investigation with the belief that I should bring to the gallows the man I had eleven years ago saved from it. This impression, however, was removed upon finding that the lady had taken with her property in jewels of considerable value. Turning my inquiries in a new direction, I learnt that a person named Gregory had, in the latter part of June, purchased a cottage on the most desolate part of the moor, under circumstances that showed a pressing need to obtain a refuge remote from observation. From the woman who sold the cottage, I learnt how I might find my way to it, and this morning I hired the lad who had conveyed the said Gregory to his abode to take me there, with the firm conviction that in Gregory I should find my old friend Wyndham, and in his custody the lady who is the object of this professional inquiry.'

I was about to speak when he stopped me abruptly.

'I beg you not to say a word that may incriminate yourself until you have heard me out. For personal reasons that I explained to you, I believe, in the past, I have no desire to gratify the wishes of Major Cleveden. But whilst he is my client I am bound in professional honour to execute the important commission with which I am entrusted. I have been engaged for months on this business, and my expenses are—we will not say enormous, but heavy. Now, sir, I am prepared to resign my commission, and accept service on the other side if you find it worth while to engage me. If you as my client assure me that Major Cleveden's wife is not under forcible detention in your cottage on Dartmoor, I am bound to believe you; and therewith the Major's investigation in that quarter is closed.'

'And if, on the other hand, I do not choose to employ you?'

'Then, sir, with regret I must inform you that within twenty-four hours you will be arrested for abduction and larceny, and Major Cleveden will once more obtain possession of the lady.'

CHAPTER XLV.

THROWING OFF THE DISGUISE.

'I WILL think it over,' said I when I had heard Beeton out.

'By all means do. I will take a turn round the village, and come back in half an hour.'

'You will find me gone.'

'Hum! And when shall I have the pleasure of seeing you again?'

'When I have decided upon the course I shall take,' was my reply.

He drew down the loose skin on his lantern jaws between his thumb and forefinger, displaying the two teeth that stood up hideous from his lower gum, his brows rising in an expression of surprise and doubt.

'Postponed *sine die*,' he said, shaking his head. 'You can hardly expect me to delay execution, so to speak, for an indefinite period. I am sure you are too sensible for that. Now, how would it be if I jogged over to-morrow afternoon, dropping in about tea-time?'

'There is no necessity for that. You shall know my decision by this time to-morrow morning.'

'Very good. Twelve o'clock,' said he, glancing at the timepiece on the chimney. 'Give you an hour's grace, and if you do not answer to the call then, I am to consider that you decline my services and are making the best use of your time to escape from the police.'

'You are at liberty to consider what you like,' said I, rising.

He looked at me sidelong in silence for a moment; then he said:

'You think you may induce the lady who

sent you to prison to declare herself your wife, and absolve you from the offence with which you will be charged.' He smiled sardonically as he shook his wicked old head. 'Well, you may induce her to promise that; but if you trust to the promises of a woman who has played you false when you were young and stainless, I stake my professional reputation that you will find yourself trapped a second time when the chance is offered her of clapping you up while she goes back in her brougham to the luxuries she has lost and her children from whom she has been taken. I trust to your good sense and the recollection of past experiences, and shall expect to see you to-morrow morning. In the meanwhile,' he added, as I put my hand on the door, 'may I ask you to give me something in the shape of a retaining fee?'

I had a five-pound note in my pocket. He took it eagerly, and rubbed it between his

thumb and fingers as if the feel of it produced the most delightful of sensations.

'Take that as a gift—I promise nothing,' said I as I left him.

I rode home, with Black Care for a companion. I remember how dark and dreary the moor looked; it had changed in a few hours. I bent my head down that I might not see it. With what eager joy I had looked forward to returning to Hebe! now I could only think of meeting her again with a dread that I should find her, too, changed. Beeton had revived a feeling within me that I thought dead for ever, by bringing before me those recollections which I had shunned of late with the same stubborn resolution that had banished happy memories from my mind in the early days of my misery. It was with a maddening sense of my own weakness that I now strove to forget her crimes, and I only succeeded partially.

I heard Howler barking before the cottage

was in sight. I dared not lift my head to see if she were there. Presently the dog rushed up, and after a long howl of welcome ran on in front, jumping up at the ambling pony's head, pirouetting in between, and barking all the time.

She was there—smiles on her lovely face! a wrap coquettishly arranged about her head and shoulders. Seeing me dejected and gloomy, her expression changed; instantly, and in a tone of sympathy, she said:

'What a horrible afternoon! you must be cold through, and tired out.'

If I had been gay, she would have found the afternoon beautiful.

She shut out the dreary sky while I was putting the pony up, and lit the lamp. The room was full of cheery comfort when I went in—the dinner-things laid, and the dishes glowing before the bright fire.

'Good God!' I said to myself, looking round; 'am I to lose all this?'

I had never seen her so sweetly amiable. It is when we are about to lose our happiness that we see its full value. Not one question did she put to find an explanation of my gloom; not an observation slipped out to show that she had cause for anxiety or apprehension. All her talk was directed to give a gayer turn to my thoughts, to divert them into pleasant channels. That was practical sympathy; all the rest is worth nothing.

And how untiring she was! how exhaustless the fund of observations she had collected during the day to interest me! Howler, the fowls, the cow, her household affairs, all provided themes that her wit and good sense made delightful.

'She must love me to be like this,' I said to myself, and then giving myself up to the joy of the present, I looked at her and smiled, forgetting all the past, until the thought struck into my heart, like the stab

of a knife, that perhaps this was the last night of my happiness. Then a mad desire possessed me to catch her in my arms, and put an end to both our lives, that such a misery as separation might be defied.

'Is there no escape? Have I lost all power of invention that I cannot outwit a feeble old rascal like Beeton?' I asked myself.

'You want to think, don't you?' asked Hebe, when she brought her work down after dinner, and found me with my elbows on the table, and my head in my hands.

'Yes—a little while,' said I.

'I must think too; for I have to make three and a half yards serve for four.'

And so she sat down quietly, where the movement of her fingers might not distract my attention; though my mood must have suggested a return to those mechanical calculations which I believe she hated with all her jealous heart, for it was in this way I used

to sit when I wanted 'to think' in former times.

I don't know how long I sat there absorbed in thought; but the end of it was that I turned suddenly, and fixed my eyes on Hebe. She met my regard with an inquiring smile in her soft eyes.

'Would you like to go away?' I asked.

'Go away!' she echoed in hushed astonishment, dropping her hands in her lap. 'Do you want me to go?'

'That's not an answer to my question.'

'I am quite happy here.'

'Quite?'

'Quite. Have you found any sign that leads you to think I am not?'

I shook my head. There were two voices speaking within me. One said, 'Will you take the word of that woman who has deceived you in the past?' The other said, 'Can you disbelieve the woman you are looking at?' My heart yielded to the influence of my eyes. The

first voice said, 'You are a fool!' The second impetuously cried, 'Better be a fool and love than the wisest man on earth without love.'

'Still,' said I, 'you must think with regret of the society and friends you have lost—of a brighter sky, of a home supplied with comforts and luxuries.'

'There are a thousand things one could wish for, and yet be happy without them.'

'Yet you would be happier with them. You yourself have said that a condition is good only until a better is obtainable.'

'But a better condition than this,' said she, looking round her, 'hardly seems possible to me now.'

'But if it were,' I asked quickly, 'would you not accept it?'

'What has suggested this to you?' she asked, evading a direct reply.

'My own discontent. I hate this barren, monotonous moor;' indeed, I felt what I said.

'I hate the perpetual mist and leaden sky. I hate the mean existence with its servile offices, its cramping restrictions, and miserable make-belief of sufficiency.'

'I know! I know! I have seen how distasteful many things have become to you with the growth of finer sensibilities; but I can light the fire, Gregory, and I don't a bit mind sweeping the floor.'

The better voice said: 'It is impossible that such a woman could be false again.'

'I should detest the work more if you did it.'

Her face lit up with pleasure to hear me say this; then, after a moment's grave thought, she said:

'Do you think we could afford to keep a little servant?'

I laughed with the knowledge that I could give her half a dozen big servants if necessary.

'A little servant won't make this moor less

bleak,' said I. 'Tell me the most beautiful place you have ever visited.'

'Oh, Amalfi in Italy is the most beautiful spot I know of at this time of year; but there are many sweet places in our own country—there's the Isle of Wight.'

'Yes; that will do. We will go there,' said I.

It took her a moment or two to overcome her astonishment, accustomed as she was to my sudden changes of attitude; then she said, tentatively:

'But the hotels, I think, are expensive, and I fear they wouldn't quite like Howler; still, we might find small apartments if you have made up your mind to go away, and we could give Howler to someone who would treat him kindly. And the cow, and Kit, and the fowls?'

Her voice dropped in a melancholy cadence of regret as she went through the list of the creatures who had responded to her affectionate care, now to be abandoned.

'We won't part with one of them. We will have a whole yardful of creatures; and

you shall have a house furnished with all the luxuries that money can buy, and servants to wait upon you; there shall not be a wish ungratified.'

She looked at me uneasily. I dare say the excitement in my face and voice justified the suspicion that I had taken leave of my sober senses. I laughed at her anxious gravity.

'I'm not mad. I mean what I say. You will see. To-morrow we will go from here to choose the new home. It is all planned out: I will go over to Newton and bring back someone to put in the house and take care of your pets, and some sort of a carriage to take you over to Tavistock, and from there we will go house-hunting.'

'But can we afford it? Is there enough left of what I brought away to pay for all these things?'

'All that you brought away lies untouched in the drawer under my bed. Not a thing is gone. You think I am a poor man; you are mistaken. While I was in prison there—

before I went wrong—I invented things that made me a rich man. I intended then that you should have every penny that was realized. You shall have it now, and as much again, and double that: I will make another and a greater fortune for you, for surely what a man does in despair can be better done under the incentive of hope. Is it a bargain?' I cried, springing to my feet in wild joy. 'Do you agree to it? Will you have all that I can give you, and want for nothing more?'

'You have taken my wits away!' she replied, laughing hysterically. 'Let me go over it quietly in my mind, and realize all you have said.'

She covered her flushed face with her delicate white hands. But I was too excited to wait for reflection.

'Tell me you will be satisfied with that,' I said.

Something in that phrase alarmed her. She took her hands slowly from her face, and fixed her eyes anxiously on me; then, after a moment's silence, she asked:

'Is it only for that you would give me all?'

'To be sure. What other motive could I have?'

She shook her head gravely without speaking; but she might have replied, 'For love that needs no motive.'

'Come,' said I, with an uneasy foreboding. 'You are too sensible to let any sentimental notion stand in the way of our happiness.'

'No; I will try to think quite practically. You would have me back into society, into the world of men and women. Tell me what position I am to hold in that world.'

Her voice had recovered its clear firmness.

'What position you choose—you shall be my sister, if you will.'

'No; there must be no more pretences.'

'Very well, then, *you shall be my wife!*'

The words came through my teeth, for passion seemed to paralyze me.

'A wife takes her husband's name,' she said slowly; 'what name will you give me?'

I saw what she meant. I reflected a minute.

To acknowledge myself Kit Wyndham was to tell the world that I had taken back the woman who had been untrue to me. I recoiled from that degradation of what seemed to me self-respecting manhood.

'I will give you any name you please—save one,' I said.

She rose from her chair, too agitated to speak, to sit still, to think even, it seemed; for, pushing back her hair, she kept her hands upon her temples as if to control her surging ideas. The position I offered her was one from which a delicate woman must instinctively recoil. The proposition was only to be forgiven through the loving lenience and wide indulgence of a devoted woman. I saw that dimly.

'We will go to Italy, where you are not known,' I said eagerly. 'I will marry you there publicly.'

'Why would you marry me?'

'I love you!'

'Oh, is it love?' she asked with strenuous

earnestness. 'Look into your heart and answer me.'

I tried to speak, and failed.

'No, no!' she implored; 'do not answer me yet. Wait but a little while—a week—a few days. Oh, it will come!' her voice rose with joyful confidence; 'that love that lives in the heart. I only ask for a few days, and then be your answer what it will, come what may to me, I will be yours, and you shall do with me what you will!'

Her lips trembled, her voice faltered, her eyes melted as she spoke. She put her hand upon the table for support. I ran to her, thinking she would fall, and put my arm round her; then I drew her towards me, and, drawing her body to my breast, pressed my lips to her cheek.

'Kit! Kit!' she cried feebly, and her head fell heavily back. She had fainted.

I carried her up to her room and laid her on her bed; and when consciousness returned I tore myself away.

CHAPTER XLVI.

BETWEEN THE EVIL AND THE GOOD.

'SHE loves me! she loves me!' I said over and over again, as I lay sleepless on my bed.

I started for Newton before daybreak, leaving a note on the table to tell Hebe that I should be back by mid-day. I was impatient to finish with Beeton—to break the connecting-link with the past. The very thought of him disturbed me with recollections that I strove to dissipate by repeating the words, 'She loves me! she loves me!' as if they were a charm.

The old man was eating his breakfast at the inn where we had separated the day before. He had a ham and fish and eggs before him,

with tea and coffee besides, evidently counting on a continuance of prosperity.

'There's nothing like beginning your day well,' he said; 'and a man in my position, with affairs on hand of incalculable complexity, needs physical support to meet the severe strain upon his intellectual faculties.'

Saying this, he moved his chair, flicked the crumbs off his knees with his ragged handkerchief, and then assumed his professional attitude.

'Now, sir, for business,' he continued; 'had I expected you so early I would have breakfasted before. We said twelve o'clock. I hope no feeling of uneasiness has hastened you.'

'I have no cause for uneasiness.'

'I thank you for the compliment,' he said, bending forward; 'I assure you no effort on my part shall be spared to assure a continuance of your confidence in my ability to avert unpleasant consequences of the proceedings taken by my late client, Major Cleveden.'

'You misunderstand me. The proceedings of Major Cleveden or anyone else give me no uneasiness, and I have no wish to deprive him of your services.'

'What, sir!' he exclaimed, with an accent of surprise. 'Am I to understand that you decline to accept my services, and are prepared to face the proceedings which, in that case, it will be my painful duty to take on behalf of my client, the Major?'

'That is exactly what you are to understand.'

'Then, why, sir?'—his astonishment disappeared, and he assumed the bland manner of a counsel convicting a witness of prevarication—'why have you taken the trouble to come here at this early hour, when it was understood between us that your absence would entail a prosecution of the suit you affect to despise?'

'I came here to save you the trouble of coming to me.'

'Oh, you are really too good—too considerate!' he murmured, rubbing his hands one over the other, and smiling blandly, while his sharp, ferrety eyes sought in my face some less disinterested explanation.

'In other words, I preferred seeing you here to seeing you on the moor.'

'Surely, my friend, you are not so simple as to think I shall stop proceedings merely because you don't want to see me with a couple of police-officers this afternoon?'

'No; but I think you are sufficiently shrewd to avoid making an expensive journey for nothing.'

He sprang up with a sudden conviction that upset all his professional equanimity.

'You're going to bolt!' he exclaimed.

'No, when I leave here I shall return home.'

'Then you have got her out of the way?'

'Do you think I should be fool enough to

come here if I had intended to do anything of that kind?'

He kept his eyes on me another moment, and then sank in his chair with a sigh of relief.

'To tell you the truth,' said he, wiping the perspiration from his forehead, 'I hardly know whether to regard you as extremely simple or the other thing. At one moment I think of you as the gull and dupe of a woman, and that old vagabond—I should say my estimable client—the Major, and the next moment I recollect that you've had eleven years in prison to get over that weakness. However, I apologize—I really do—for ever thinking that you could be so wanting in generous feeling, so despicably mean, as to bolt.'

'I might have bolted if I had seen any advisability in it.'

'And will you tell me, my dear sir, why it is not advisable?'

'I have nothing to fear from the police, or you, or the Major, or anyone in the world.'

'How do you propose to meet the charges I explained to you yesterday?'

'My wife took nothing that was not hers, and she will, if needs be, acknowledge that I am her husband, and that she left the Hermitage voluntarily to come to me.'

'You have told her of your danger—of our meeting yesterday,' he said sharply.

'I have not mentioned your name.'

'You have not mentioned my name, or hinted at these proceedings?' he asked with an earnestness that I then misconstrued as a sign of incredulity.

'No.'

'And she has led you to believe that she will do this for you; that she is capable of such self-sacrifice as this acknowledgment would seem to involve—I say "would seem to involve" advisedly, for absolutely that acknowledgment would involve no self-sacrifice, as I will show you presently.'

'I believe that she will do anything that a loving woman should do.'

'I'll be bound the Major holds the same opinion; and so do I.'

'I don't ask you to believe in repentance,' I said fiercely.

'You make it hard to believe that anyone can change an early disposition. For here are you after eleven years of penal servitude as simple and guileless as the day you first went to prison for that woman. Don't get in a rage, but hear me out. I forget my profession, my poverty even, in the feelings of a man who sees another blindly setting his foot over a precipice. For mercy's sake, think what you are doing, and listen to reason and common-sense. This woman sent you to prison for life; she rewarded the man who helped her to commit that crime by staying with him eleven years as his wife; she had two children by him. You take her away from her children, her friends, and all the luxuries with which she was surrounded, and keep her prisoner on a moor, and in a hut. After being

but a few months in her society, you are so infatuated with her, so completely befooled by her arts and address, that you are ready again to put your life in her hands. By George, you are simpler than Samson in the hands of Delilah! Grant, for the sake of argument, and to put her conduct in the best light, that she actually loves you—that she has not worked cunningly upon your palpable simplicity and ignorance of women—say that she is infatuated with you.' He paused to look at me and grin derisively. 'Admit all that, is it reasonable to suppose that a love so quickly brought into existence can last, that as she has gone already from you to the Major, and from him again to you, she will not in turn yield to some new caprice? Get her face out of your mind, and answer me that.'

I could not answer. My reason told me that I ought not to trust the woman; it told me besides that to yield to the passion of love for such a creature was infamous and debasing.

I walked across the room with uncontrollable agitation ; suddenly I stopped.

'No matter,' said I hoarsely ; 'I will trust her. If she held poison to my lips I would drink it ;' and then, suddenly moved with a more generous emotion, I cried : 'But she is true ! I feel it here in my heart. She will never leave me.'

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

'If you are fixed in that opinion—if you don't want to lose her, nor let her lose you —I advise you to make terms with me.'

'What can you do ?'

'I'll tell you, since you can't see your own danger. I said just now that her acknowledgment of you would involve no self-sacrifice on her part, by which I meant that it wouldn't save you from being arrested, or her from being taken back to the Hermitage by the Major. Have you got your marriage certificate ? Has your wife got hers—the first, I mean—over there in the hut ? Your silence

tells me that you have not. Well, I can inform you that the Major is armed with his, and that until you have procured yours to prove the justice of your claim, he can keep you in custody for abducting his wife, and do just whatever he likes with her in the interim. In that interim,' he continued, chuckling over his success, 'I should think the fickle young lady would have time to forget the convict, and find more charms in her military friend.'

'What do you propose?'

'Will you leave the matter entirely in my hands?'

'I will see.'

'Well, if I may regard you as my client I should say decidedly—bolt! For though I throw up my brief for the Major, another may take it up, and you will never again be safe on the moor.'

'I agree to that. We will go.'

'But before I can consent to my client—and I am proud to call you my client—taking

that step, we must be certain about the fidelity of our capricious lady. I am very much mistaken if she has not the same view of her position that I take, and is only lulling you into confidence in order to betray you.'

'Keep to the point,' I said, getting in a rage.

'That is the point; for we must not venture to take her through a civilized place in the daytime if she is likely to hail the first policeman she catches sight of to give my client into custody.'

'Well, what do you offer? What do you suggest? Out with it!'

'This, my dear sir. We will prove your wife's fidelity, and make the first step towards escape at one and the same time.'

'How?'

'You shall stay here whilst I go over to the hut in the baker's cart and make her exactly the offer I should have made had I found her alone the other day—namely, the

offer to conduct her safely to Major Cleveden. If she consents, I shall bring her back with me, and we shall then know that we must be careful in moving her further to——'

'If she yields—if you bring her back with you,' said I, clenching my fists, 'keep her out of my reach.'

'Don't be excited, my dear sir. She may not yield. If I come back alone, why, I'll make you a present of my services.'

I could not even then in my weakness determine on a course which might prove her false. I wanted still at all cost to believe her innocent of this last treachery.

'That is my advice,' said the old man. 'And if you cannot reconcile yourself to be guided by it, I must with regret ask you to obtain professional help from another source.

'I agree,' said I.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE PROOF.

It was ten o'clock when the trap came to the door that was to carry Beeton across the moor. The same lad drove who had made the journey before.

'How long will it take one to get across to the cottage and back again?' asked the old man, pulling on his gloves.

'Four hours the actual journey,' I replied.

'Then you may expect to see me shortly after two. In the meantime you can settle what you intend to do with your wife. When she finds I have led her into a trap instead of letting her out of one, there'll be a row.'

'I shall know how to silence her.'

'You say that she does not know that you are here? Don't know the road, nor the driver there?'

'No.'

'Then there'll be no difficulty about bringing her here a little after two,' he said, preparing to get up into the cart.

'Wait,' said I. 'You have made no allowance for the time it will take you to persuade her to play me false.'

'Oh yes; that's reckoned in. I've allowed five minutes.'

He stepped up nimbly. His manner, even more forcibly than his words, bore evidence that he entertained no shadow of a doubt about obtaining this fresh proof of Hebe's treachery.

'If I *should* be mistaken,' he said, turning round as the cart moved—'if I am *not* back by two, you will come on and find me.'

For four terrible hours I walked to and

fro along the road skirting the moor in a state of mind which I dare not attempt to analyze. Now I was in a frenzy of despair; now in a delirium of hope: at one moment I was tempted to throw myself under a passing waggon for having doubted the sincerity of Hebe's love; the next I had the will to fling her to the earth and crush the life out of her; and between these seizures of conflicting passions my brain, exhausted by the past paroxysm, sank into a state of apathy in which the most trivial things occupied my thoughts: the drifting of a few snow-flakes in the wind—a cat prowling stealthily round a rick upon some sparrows. I could not reason—could not class my ideas consecutively; I could walk a hundred yards in one direction, a hundred yards in the other, and watch the moor, but nothing else steadfastly. What else was there to do?

Beeton had told me to prepare means for carrying my wife away in safety, but there

was no need for that. If she returned with him we must finish here. We could go no further. I had no notion what I should say to her — what I should do with her. It would be soon enough to decide upon action when the time came to act. The shorter the struggle, the quicker the end, the better for both of us.

As the hour drew near for her to come, I shivered in every limb with emotion. When the church clock chimed the half-hour past one, I ceased my monotonous march, and strained my eyes upon the point where the cart should reappear, and there stood motionless, waiting for the sound of the clock, like a man on the scaffold listening for the cry of reprieve. For if she did not come within the time prescribed by Beeton, I might hope—yes, I might fairly hope—that his persuasions had failed to shake my wife's fidelity. At last the clock struck two, and, as if my hopes were already con-

firmed. I shouted out with joy, while the tears, starting into my eyes, blurred out everything from my sight.

I ran to the inn for the pony, brushing the tears that continued to flow, despite myself, from my face as I went. Then coming back to the road, I dared hardly turn my eyes over the moor for fear of seeing the cart, it being yet barely time for Beeton's return. But when I found that my fears were not confirmed, and that, rising in my saddle, I could see no moving thing anywhere, my heart again leaped up in exultation, and joy thrilled my body.

I could laugh now at Beeton, but I bore him no ill-will; for had he not been the unwilling instrument to prove beyond doubt that I need never again mistrust my wife? For his own ends, and to justify the conviction on which he had staked that professional reputation by which he set so much value, he would have neglected no effort to

induce Hebe to forsake me and rejoin the Major. And he had failed. Well, I would pay him ten times more for his failure than ever he would have got out of me by succeeding. The unfortunate old rascal should have an annuity that he might live decently if he chose to; that I resolved to do. To be sure, it was not yet certain that he had failed, but every step onward made the probability greater, and by the time I had got half-way over the moor I could hardly find a lingering doubt.

'Now in five minutes,' thought I, 'as soon as I pass those three boulders, I shall hear Howler.' But the boulders were passed, and the cottage roof was visible above the brown heather, and yet I heard no sound. I made excuses for the dog's silence, and put the pony to a faster pace.

I expected to see the cart in front of the cottage. When I found that it was not there, I had to invent an explanation, as in the case

of Howler's silence. It had been put up under the rocks, and the horse turned into the stable. That was sensible enough to suppose. It was just as unreasonable to imagine that the poor brute would be kept standing there in the driving sleet for no purpose. But, nevertheless, I cast my eyes down to see if there was no fresh track of wheels on the ground. The snow that had been falling steadily for the last hour was unmarked.

My anxiety was terrible as I drew nearer the house. There was no movement—no sound. The dog should have come to meet me or given tongue. The silence added to the desolation of the place. It looked as if the cottage was deserted. A childish feeling of mingled sorrow and fear agitated me. When I tried to call out and make my approach known, my voice died on my quivering lips.

'Hebe!' I cried at last, mastering the fearful trembling of my heart. My voice croaked hoarsely in my throat.

I threw myself off the pony long before we were at the cottage, and ran on like a madman to the door. Outside I stood, listening with that irresolution which stays one's hand from breaking the seal of a letter which is known to contain tidings of calamity.

I opened the door at last. The fire was out. That was all I saw.

'Hebe!' I called, my heart breaking with despair. 'Hebe—my wife!—I have come home! Kit Wyndham, your husband!'

My ears cracked as I listened for the reply that never came.

Then, seized with one last, mad hope, I ran up the stairs into her room. It was empty! One of the drawers stood open. The silence appalled me.

I went down, hoping I know not what—that I should find her dead somewhere—anything rather than the confirmation of a more dread fear.

Could she be in my room, I wondered?

Setting out upon that forlorn hope, I opened the door and thrust my head in. But I did not draw it back as quickly. Slowly I pushed the door back and advanced a step, my eyes fixed on new evidence that seemed to stun me.

Just in front of me was my bedstead. The drawer beneath it was pulled out. The lock had been burst; it hung inward by one screw. The drawer itself was empty. My clothing was scattered about upon the floor. Everything was there except the box that contained my wife's jewels and my money.

I had told her only the night before where I kept her jewels.

'Good Heaven!' I cried, half aloud; 'is it possible that she, the woman who lay against my breast last night, is base enough for this?'

Strangely enough, at the moment when I had this damning evidence before me I recoiled from the belief in her guilt. The hopes

she had caused to spring up in my heart could not all die at once.

Another explanation offered itself, and I seized upon it as if it were an inspiration. Beeton had murdered her for the sake of the money. I prayed it might be even that—anything so that I might love her still, and die loving her.

As I turned away to go out and seek her body and strode towards the outer door, my eye fell on a sheet of paper that lay on the table. Could it be a message left there for me? It was.

Written with a pencil in large characters were these words:

'We are going on to Torquay. You will find me there at the Bell.

'BEETON.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PREPARING FOR THE END.

It was pitch dark when I left the moor and urged on my lame pony to Torquay. I found Beeton at the Bell, eating. It seemed as if nothing could satisfy his hunger.

'Where is she?' I gasped.

'Gone.'

'Where?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'All I can tell with respect to her present movement is that she left here by the up train'—glancing at the timepiece—'thirty-five minutes since.'

'Why did she not go back to the Hermitage?'

'Because Major Cleveden is no longer there.'

I looked steadily at that seedy, cunning old man for a minute or so in silence without disconcerting him; only when I burst out laughing he looked uneasy. It must have been a hideous noise, for my parched throat was contracted as if a rope were drawn tightly about it.

'You were right,' said I, emptying the teapot into a glass that stood on the table. 'Time doesn't change our dispositions; she's what she was eleven years ago, and so am I. Once a fool always a fool.'

'Simple, my friend, simple!' said the old man in a tone of expostulation as I drained the glass.

'A fool!' I repeated angrily, clutching the glass and half minded to dash it into his smiling face. 'Better men than I have been deceived by the seeming innocence of a pretty woman; but the silliest clown would have

more sense than to be taken in by you, a needy trickster, whose very look should warn one to mistrust you. Only an idiot would fall into such a trap—the confidence trick, you call it, don't you?'

'Really, sir, I must ask you to explain,' he said, with an absurd air of offended dignity.

'You hoodwinked me to serve your employer Cleveden. I see it all now—as clear as the yokel when his purse is gone. You planted me there at Newton with a fool's trust in my heart while you got her safely out of my reach. The confidence trick—yes, that's what it's called. Tell me that she laughed when you told her that you had left me waiting there while she escaped.' Then breaking suddenly from this self-bantering tone, I said, with menacing vehemence: 'Do you know that I could strangle you with one hand?'

'I dare say you could—I dare say you would if you believed that I had deceived you,' he replied, trying to maintain an air of

composure as he edged towards the door. 'But you can't believe that if you read the paper I left for you to find. Granted that I am—not a fool, should I take the trouble to tell you where to find me, and wait quietly for you to come and strangle me?'

'Why did you bring her here?'

'You yourself told me to keep her out of your reach if I succeeded in getting her away from the cottage. Your looks as you spoke impressed the caution on my mind. You would have murdered her if I had brought her to you, and I have too great a respect for the interest of my clients to permit them to fall into errors of that kind.'

'You will make me believe that you're not playing a double game—that you didn't bring her here in the interest of your client Cleveden?'

'I have sufficient faith in your common-sense to hope that I shall make you believe that—when you are cool. To begin with,

should I have brought her here and taken her to the Hermitage, when I knew for certain that the house has been shut up for the past six weeks, if I had intended to restore the lady to the Major? Go with me to the Hermitage. The lodge-keeper will tell you that we called there about five o'clock, and that we were particularly anxious to learn where Major Cleveden was to be found, and quite distressed in finding that the lodge-keeper could give us no information. Now, why on earth should I give myself and the lady that unnecessary trouble (supposing my interests were inimical to yours) when I knew perfectly well all the time where the Major was to be found?'

He gave me a few moments to digest this, and then continued:

'You will ask me next why, having brought the lady here, I allowed her to go off before your arrival.'

I nodded sullenly.

'The answer to that is, that I considered it advisable to keep her out of your reach—it was your own suggestion—a little longer, allowing you time to discuss with me some better scheme of retribution than the unprofessional course of murder. Another reason for letting her go was that I couldn't prevent her. As I warned you this morning, that young woman is sufficiently wide awake to call for the protection of the police if she finds herself in danger of personal violence; and nothing but personal violence could have prevented her going off by that train.'

The explanation was plausible enough; but I was suspicious now to a greater degree than I had been confiding before.

'Do you know where she is gone?' I asked.

'I took the ticket for her. She is gone to London.'

'The Major is there?'

'No; he is not, or I should not have advised her to seek him there.'

'I will find her there,' said I, making a stride towards the door.

'No, you will not, without my assistance. Sit down, my dear sir. There is not another train to Exeter before 7.30. I have been studying the time-tables, as you see.' He laid his hand on a pile beside the tea-tray. 'And if you take my advice, you won't go to London then.'

'What is your advice?' I asked savagely.

'My advice is,' said he, after a dry cough and seating himself again, 'that we come to a distinct understanding with regard to the future. I decline to take service in the capacity of "a needy trickster." There must be no more accusations of that kind. You must have confidence in me, or I refuse to act at all. I expect to be paid for my services, not "strangled with one hand."'

'Before I accept your services, I must know what you propose to do.'

'That is reasonable. There are two courses

by which justice, retribution, or what you please to call it, may be obtained. It is a matter of taste which should be taken, and that I leave to you. But mark this, my dear sir: there must be no personal violence committed whilst our professional connection exists. I must insist upon that as a personal safeguard. Should you feel the spirit of vengeance obtaining a mastery over your reason, you must settle up with me before gratifying your vindictive inclinations.'

'You mean that I must pay you before I murder my wife and give myself up to the hangman?'

He inclined his head.

'I agree to that.'

I saw now another reason why he had been so careful to keep my wife out of my reach.

'As I said, there are two courses open to you. The simplest is to intercept the lady before she reaches the Major, and claim her as your wife before he can claim her as his.'

'Is there yet time to do that?'

'Plenty,' said he, glancing at the timepiece; 'we needn't leave here before 7.15. We can get to the station in ten minutes.'

'And the other course?'

'That is more complicated, and requires greater patience and self-restraint; but, on the whole, I think it is more satisfactory. You will suffer the lady to rejoin the Major, and resume her former position. When they have settled down quietly, you will take advantage of some occasion when she shall be surrounded by her family and friends—say a dinner-party or a public ball—and dressing yourself with scrupulous regard for the surroundings and the station of your wife, but still keeping your character as Gregory, the escaped convict—I got a brief outline of your pretended history in the cart this afternoon—still preserving that character, you will publicly denounce her as one with whom you were formerly on terms of close intimacy, and who quitted her hus-

band and remained with you six months on the moor. The consequences of this public exposure will be punishment enough in my estimation; but, of course, I shall not pretend to exercise any control over your actions after I have brought you face to face with your wife. As soon as you see her, I shall expect a full discharge of your obligations to me.'

'You shall have it,' I said, drawing a long breath, and trembling with the prospect of this terrible vengeance.

'One question of a delicate nature must be answered before we go further, and that is, what value we shall fix upon these obligations. Possibly at the last moment it will be inconvenient to make out a bill of costs. You might, for instance, on seeing your wife, be seized with a wish—a desire——'

'To fire a bullet into her heart! Yes; go on.'

'Therefore, the system of payment for services might be attended with inconveniences, besides possibly lengthening the pro-

ceedings. Now, payment by result—a lump sum down——'

'Yes; I will pay you that way the moment I see her.'

'This is very considerate and nice. But, unfortunately, my dear sir, you were weak enough to tell your wife where you kept her jewels and your money; and, as you perhaps observed, she did not forget the fact in the hurry of parting.'

I bowed my head, feeling as if my wife's shame were mine.

'She told you that!' I muttered in wondering regret.

'She also intimated, incidentally, that you had other resources.'

'Otherwise, you would have got her out of my way altogether, instead of betraying her into my hands.'

'It is quite possible,' he said, unabashed by the charge; 'professional etiquette does not oblige a man to make a fool of himself.'

'How much do you want? Speak out.'

'Shall we say one hundred guineas, or——'

He checked himself abruptly in suggesting an abatement, as I drew out the pocket-book in which I had some notes; I had two of ten pounds each and one of five.

'Give me a sheet of paper, and I will write for more,' said I.

He fetched the writing materials with alacrity.

'Where shall I have the money sent?'

He considered a moment, and then replied:

'Ajaccio, Corsica. You have more than enough to take us there.'

'Corsica! Is that where she is gone?'

'That is where she will go when she finds that the Major and her children are there. She has gone to London—as I told you—to learn his address from her father. She cannot start before to-morrow morning. We shall be at Southampton at 11.30, and cross to Havre by the boat that leaves at midnight.

In that way we shall reach Ajaccio before she does.'

I wrote a few lines to Mr. Renshaw, asking him to send me a couple of hundred pounds, addressed to the *Poste Restante*, Ajaccio.

'Now that our arrangement is concluded so far satisfactorily,' said he as I closed the letter, 'may I suggest that you should take some refreshment? We shall get nothing before we reach Havre to-morrow morning—if the departure of the Paris train gives time for that. We must fortify ourselves for these exertions, and the cold shoulder of mutton is delicious; so are the pickled walnuts.'

He himself took my letter to the post while I ate what I could with feverish haste, rather as if my life were at stake than a worthless woman's.

At 7.30 we left Torquay, and at midnight we were on board the Havre boat. The following afternoon Paris was behind us. Thus far there had been no delay; but at

Marseilles we found that we must wait a day for the boat to take us to Ajaccio.

'This is as well,' said Beeton; 'for I have observed that our present appearance attracts the attention of the police. A bath would do us good; so would a substantial meal. After that a few francs might be judiciously laid out in clean linen and a portmanteau. We should then look less as if we had absconded.'

Indeed, we looked disreputable enough, despite Beeton's green gloves and umbrella; and though I was completely indifferent to what people might think of us, or even to personal comfort, I fell in with his suggestion not unwillingly. There was good reason to suppose that we were in advance of my wife, and I hoped to finish with her there in Marseilles.

I had no wish now to carry out the elaborate system of revenge Beeton had suggested; all I wanted was to meet my wife and get it all over, and be done with it all for ever. It was

no use to drag out such a miserable farce as this life of heartless trickery and cruel mockery had become.

'What do you wish to know, my dear sir?' asked Beeton, when I called for a time-table at the café.

'What time the trains come in from Paris.'

He took alarm at once.

'Surely you would not be so ill advised as to make a scene upon the railway platform—to attempt any act of violence in the vicinity of the police, and——'

'You have your ticket for Ajaccio; you can go there and claim the letter at the post-office with the remittance from England. My discharge papers are in this pocket. You can take them if—if I don't go to-morrow.'

Upon this assurance he ate his dinner in contentment, and suffered me to walk upon the platform alone while he amused himself with an English paper he had bought at the book-stall.

I was there on the platform until the last train came in at night; I was there when the first train arrived in the morning. Not a woman of all those who streamed past the barrier escaped my eyes. I had no sense of weariness or impatience. A dull aching at my heart was all the feeling left to it.

In the evening, when I rose from the table of the restaurant, seeing that another train was due in ten minutes, Beeton said, with brows expressive of painful regret:

'I fear there will not be time to see this train in; we must go down to the quay and embark in five minutes.'

'We may just as well wait here; she must pass sooner or later if she comes at all.'

'If she comes, very true; but it seems to me more than probable, as the lady has not yet come, that she has gone on by Leghorn and Bastia to escape the long sea voyage. She is not the kind of person who would encounter unnecessary discomfort.'

'That's true,' said I. 'We'll go down to the boat.'

The sun was rising over the mountains as we disembarked at Ajaccio. Beeton, who had been miserably ill from the time we left Marseilles, came on deck only when the landing boat was waiting alongside. He was the colour of an old parchment, and had not a word to say. But his spirits revived when we stood once more on firm ground.

'Where is the Cours Grandval?' he asked of a commissionaire.

'There,' replied the man, pointing up the avenue of palms and orange-trees; 'past the square and the barracks, beyond the fountain of the four lions.'

'We must keep clear of that,' said Beeton, turning off to the right. 'The Major lives up there. If he catches sight of me, he'll whisk your wife out of the way if she is here, or stop her on the road if she has not arrived. That will entail a great deal of inconvenience and delay.'

Knowing what had happened in the past, I thought there might be another reason for his wishing to escape the Major's observation.

'You'll have to keep out of the way while I make inquiries,' he said at breakfast. 'There are three or four ways by which your wife may come here—by boat from Marseilles; train from Bocognano; or by diligence or private carriage from Calvi. Probably she will choose the latter, and in that case may arrive at any time. You can't watch all the roads; so you will have to adopt the course I suggested: meet her in public, and——' he coughed expressively.

'So that we don't have to wait long,' said I sullenly, my eyes fixed on the blade of a knife that lay on the table. A ray of light striking the stopper of a decanter threw an iridescent gleam upon it; in one part it seemed stained with a spot of living blood!

CHAPTER XLIX.

WHAT THE WORLD SAID.

THREE days passed, and nothing occurred to break the dead monotony. I found a letter from Mr. Renshaw at the post-office, and got the draft it contained cashed at the bank. Counting up the notes before Beeton, I put the stipulated sum in an envelope.

'This is ready for you,' I said, hoping that I might tempt him to bring matters to a speedier termination.

'Rest assured, my dear sir,' said he, 'that I am not less anxious than you to discharge my obligations. Nothing can be done till your wife arrives, and I am absolutely certain that she is not yet here.'

As the days dragged on I began to doubt if she would come, but Beeton showed no sign of anxiety; on the contrary, his spirits seemed to rise as the time lengthened. We saw each other night and morning. During the day he devoted himself to making inquiries in the cafés; I to watching the railway-station, the quay, and the roads to Calvi and Bocognano.

On the afternoon of the third day, returning from the Calvi road through the woods, I came to a point on the hillside from which the whole length of the Cours Grandval lay before me. On the right-hand side, looking down towards the sea, stood a row of Italian villas, which, in compliment to the English who people this quarter, are called cottages. I had learnt that the one next to the British Consul's was Major Cleveden's. The consul's house was marked by the flag which he displays on Sundays. The roof nearer to me, standing out against the eucalyptus beyond, might at that moment cover my wife's head.

Whilst I was looking down at it a man came from the garden before the house and turned down towards the *Place*. There was no mistaking him, even at that distance; it was old Beeton.

I saw now why he had grown so gay. The explanation was this—Major Cleveden had outbidden me, and the old rascal was keeping me there while my wife got away.

Was she already gone? That I determined to discover for myself.

I descended the hill and got into the Cours Grandval. The Hôtel des Étrangers stood nearly opposite the Major's house. I turned in there. The coffee-room faced the street. Through the open windows I had an uninterrupted view of the house over the way. The room was empty. I wheeled a chair round to face the window. The waiter brought me a bottle of wine and left me.

A cart, filled with pots of palms and camellias, drew up before the house, and the driver

rang the bell. A boy, dressed in a sailor costume, came from the open door on to the perron, and ran back, calling in a clear, high voice, 'The flowers have come, mamma!' 'That must be her boy,' I thought, 'and she is still here.' The man in charge of the cart took out the palms and camellias and set them on the path. When they were all out he began to carry them into the house.

Three or four men came into the coffee-room—English and American—seated themselves near the other window, and called loudly for drinks.

The high chair in which I sat was so turned that the back screened me from the observation of the men at the other window, and I was so absorbed in watching the house that I never moved from the position I had taken on first seating myself. From the loud and unreserved way in which they talked it was more than probable that the men were unconscious of my presence. Their conversation had no

interest for me until I heard the name of Major Cleveden mentioned.

'What, another of 'em!' exclaimed one. 'By Jove! the place swarms with majors. There's the old boy on the other side of the bay—he's a major; there's Major Thingamy down at Barbacajo, where we bought the mandarins; and our flag-fluttering consul over there's a major; and now there's this Major Cleveden to add to the list. Why, our gallant friends constitute the larger half of the community.'

'The *major* part,' suggested a second voice.

'Oh!' from the rest.

'What's the explanation?' asked one sententiously.

'Why are you here?'

'Doctor's orders, my dear boy!'

'That's my excuse; but I doubt if you believe me much more than I believe you.'

'Oh, I'm ready to admit that the doctor or

anyone else would order you to leave England —you're so d—d disagreeable.'

There was a laugh at this sally. When it subsided one said :

'Jack's right. One would rather be thought weak-chested than weak-kneed. Men settle down in a place like this, where living's cheap, because they have not the pluck to face poverty at home.'

'That doesn't seem to be the case with our friend over the way ; he's taking in camellias regardless of expense. What's going on there ?'

'There's to be a dance to-night.'

'Sunday—phew !'

'Custom of the country. One rejoices here on Sundays.'

'Yes. But what do the other English say ?'

'My dear fellow, the Major wishes it to be understood that he doesn't care a rap what the English say—being out of England.'

'That's Jack all over.'

'Jack's observation applies to us all. We're only Pharisees at home.'

'That's the best excuse I've heard yet for living abroad—it's the Major's,' said he they called Jack.

'Jack smiles as if he loved the Major.'

'When Jack smiles it's to hide a sneer.'

'You may explain that by the fact that I am the Major's friend.'

'Are you going over there to-night?'

'Yes. The theatre is closed, and I am fond of the drama.'

'You don't mean to say they're going in for private theatricals—*to-night?*'

'I should like you to tell me at what time we are not going in for private theatricals, my sweet innocent. Every room's a stage as well as all the world, and at any moment we may be called upon the scene.'

'What is the nature of the play over there?'

'That is exactly what I have to learn.

You never know beforehand how Nature's play will finish—in tears or in smiles ; that's the advantage of her work over those of less skilful dramatists.'

'Can you give us a hint at the plot ?'

'Yes; and without betraying the Major's confidence. He is not the sort of man to let out secrets. But certain facts are known to everyone here—except you ; and whether they are known to you, or what anyone may say, is, as I told you, a matter of perfect indifference to the stout-hearted old soldier. Here are the facts : Ten or twelve years ago Major Cleveden married the younger of two sisters. They lived happily together for some time, until after the birth of the second child—about three years ago. Then the wife's health began to fail. She was said to be in a decline. Her malady was some form of hypochondria, which the medical men declared must end fatally unless some radical change was made in her life. The poor old Major, who seems

to have been devotedly attached to her, did all he could to produce that change—taking her from one part of Europe to another, and seeking every means of turning her thoughts into a healthy channel. The wife faded and faded, and then suddenly, last June, she disappeared, and no trace of her could be found. It was believed that she had learnt what her fate must be from the doctors, and had put an end to a life which she felt a burden to herself and a lingering source of torture to her husband. They were living at that time near Torquay, and it was supposed she had thrown herself into the sea from the cliffs. First act—tragedy!

'After three months of fruitless search the Major did what a sensible man, with a couple of helpless children, would do if he could—he married his wife's sister. In England, thanks to a House of Lords and bishops, that is a crime which lays a woman and her children open to the insult of the

uncharitable, and as the Major did not care to make his wife's happiness dependent on charity, he came here, where civilization is less advanced. Second act—drama with a purpose!

'The Major had just settled down in his new house, and introduced his wife and children to the world of Ajaccio, when one fine evening — Thursday was particularly fine, you remember?—wife No. 1 turns up in better health than she has shown for years — having in the interim found that change which the Major had sought in vain to procure for her!'

'Hang it all! that's a rum story.'

'I see by the way you fellows grin that you think its going to turn out a farcical comedy.'

'Well, you know—what had she been at all the time?'

'Looks as if she had found another major.'

'The Major will have to sell out and settle in Turkey.'

'Yes'—it was Jack's voice now—'it's pretty clear you think it a play for the Palais Royal. What a set you are, rebuking me for the smile that hides a sneer, while you jeer with the laugh of a clown through a horse-collar! What do you know of this woman, that you should hint lightly at another major, or of him, that you should suggest by way of a joke (save the mark!) his taking his children and those unhappy sisters to Turkey?'

'Hang it all, Jack! a fellow may joke.'

'At women? I don't like that sort of profanity. Do you know how quickly sensitive they are, and do you know how long it would take her to read the indecent jest in your heart? Why, just as long as it would take you to summon up the semblance of decency in your face. *You* have not left your pharisaism behind you.'

'That will do, Jack,' said one, in playful expostulation. 'Foster will be a good boy, and make no more naughty jokes. How do you think it will end over there?'

'That is just what excites my curiosity, and what I expect to learn to-night. The Major would not invite friends to his house three days after the return of his wife, unless he had some purpose in it. You may be sure he does not intend to let the world thrust its tongue in its cheek behind his back.'

'But what can he do?'

'That he knows better than we can imagine. You may be sure that curiosity to see the two sisters will make everyone accept the invitation he has issued. The invitation is itself an intimation that the Major intends to take all those who call themselves his friends into his confidence. What the consequences may be it is hard to

imagine ; but it's certain enough that he is prepared to abide by them—either to accept us as friends, or to live down our enmity, as becomes an old soldier and an honest gentleman.'

CHAPTER L.

'IF PEOPLE WILL HAVE TRANSACTIONS WITH DOUBLE-DEALERS !'

'I've been looking for you the last hour,' said Beeton, overtaking me in the Cours Napoléon later on—'hunting for you everywhere.'

'In the Cours Grandval?' I asked, turning upon him.

His cunning eyes sought an explanation of the question in my face.

'You have been to the Major's,' he said.

'No, but *you* have.'

Seeing that it was useless to deny the charge, he nodded.

'Come and sit down. I've something to tell you.'

He crossed the road, and seated himself before an unoccupied table outside a café—a ruse to gain time for the arrangement of his ideas.

'The end is nearly accomplished,' he said, resting his arms on the table, leaning across, and speaking in a confidential tone. 'She is here.'

'I know it. She has been here two days. How long have you known it?'

'Since the day before yesterday.'

'Then you told me a deliberate lie when you said last night that you had heard nothing of her.'

'I found it practical to suppress information in the interest of my client. Don't be impatient, my dear sir. I say I did this in your interest. If I had consulted my own merely, I should have led you yesterday morning when we met on the quay to the

road that runs parallel with the Cours Grandval, and pointed out your wife, where I saw her sitting with her children in the garden at the back of the Major's house. I should then have completed my undertaking, and could have claimed the fee agreed upon without any further risk to myself.'

'Yes, you might have done that, possibly; but you preferred instead to see if you could not do better by conniving with the Major to get my wife out of the way for a higher sum.'

'I do not attempt to deny that there may be some truth in that insinuation.'

'But finding that the Major would have nothing to do with you, that he is more anxious to get rid of my wife now than to keep her, that double-dealing is likely to bring you loss instead of profit, you—you have been looking for me the last hour to tell me what I have found out for myself.'

'If your premises were just, your conclusions would be admirable, dear sir; but they are not. In the first place, the Major has met me in a friendly and, I may add, a conciliatory spirit, which shows an anxiety on his part to profit by my services; and in the second, I reckon, with something like absolute certainty, on rendering assistance to both clients to my own pecuniary advantage. Now, sir, to be explicit—on the day of our arrival I called upon the Major. I told him frankly and candidly what had happened. Pointing out to him that your wife would probably be here in a few hours, and that you would certainly claim her as soon as you saw her, I offered, for a certain sum in excess of the fee you had offered to pay me, to take you back to England or elsewhere on a false scent. The Major refused my offer in a manner that excited my surprise and indignation. But on making inquiries I discovered the cause. The

Major, believing your wife was dead, had married your wife's sister ; and, therefore, as you just now suggested, was more anxious to get rid of your wife than to keep her. You can understand the embarrassing position in which he would be placed with the two ladies on his hands. Perceiving this, I at once returned to the Major, despite the unpleasant and unceremonious manner in which he had dismissed me, and I then informed him that unless he agreed to terms I should remove you from Ajaccio before your wife arrived. The Major, now aroused to the danger of his position, at once changed his front, and meeting me in that conciliatory spirit I just now referred to, he promised to consider my proposal and give me an answer in twenty-four hours. The meaning of this delay was that he wished to confirm the truth of my statement, that your wife was coming here, before engaging my services. At six o'clock the following morning your

wife arrived here. She came in a carriage from Corte, and the information being brought to me a little after seven by one of my agents, I lost no time in dressing and making a call on the Major. In a long interview he asked me what course you intended to take. I told him that you, ignoring his second marriage, and believing that he would introduce your wife to his friends as his own wife, would take a favourable opportunity of claiming her in the face of those friends. There is nothing succeeds like telling the truth—sometimes ; and you will recollect that this is the plan I suggested to you.'

'Have you anything else to tell me?'

'Undoubtedly, my dear sir, or I should not have told you so much. When I had laid your intentions before the Major, he said he would provide you with an occasion to claim your wife. This proves that he is anxious now to get rid of her. I suggested an early date—having regard to his interests, yours,

and my own. He then promised that he would give a dinner-party to-night, to which he would invite all his friends, and I undertook that you should be present. This afternoon I called again upon him, and finding all his arrangements were made, I sought you in order to make this statement.'

I laughed, believing that he would have kept the matter entirely to himself if my discovery had not compelled the explanation.

'Now, sir,' he continued, 'I should hardly be entitled to call myself your friend, as well as legal adviser, if I intended to let the matter rest there. Nor should I consider that I was acting in justice to myself to leave the rest to chance. I have undertaken that you shall be present at this entertainment, and my fee will be paid on condition that you are there. You could defeat the Major's object by staying away, but you will not stay away. According strictly to the letter of our agreement, my fee is to be paid when I bring you face to face

with your wife; but I consider that my obligation extends beyond that. I intend to give you the means of revenge, not only upon your wife, but upon the Major, who is fully as much to blame as she. You shall go to that house to-night. I suggest about nine o'clock, when the company may be rising from dinner. No obstacle will be placed in the way of your entering, you may be sure. You will find your wife with her children, her sister, and the Major, surrounded by all the English in the place. The Major will say, "Who is this gentleman?" Oh, it's all arranged—cut and dried, you may be sure. And then your wife, with an appropriate cry of delight and astonishment, will say, "It is my husband!" Then you will reply, "No; that woman is Major Cleveden's wife. My name is Gregory, an ex-convict, and the friend of Kit Wyndham, whom that man," pointing to the Major, "and that woman," pointing to your wife, "fettered for life;" and with that you will walk out and

leave the Major and those two women to stew in their own juice.'

The scheme of vengeance held out, though terrible enough, failed to revive a spark of that vindictive passion which had burned so fiercely in my breast; a sense of disgust for this villainous old trickster, for myself in submitting to his guidance, was all that I felt.

'The scandal will spread,' said the old man, rubbing his hands. 'Not one of them will ever be able to show a face in society. And I shall be even with the Major for the injuries he has done me.'

'You're not ashamed of the part you are playing?'

'Ashamed!' he exclaimed in unfeigned astonishment. 'If people will have transactions with double-dealers, they must expect this sort of thing.'

There was revelation in that one unstudied phrase. I got up, repeating to myself the words, 'If people will have transactions with

double-dealers, they must expect this sort of thing.' I repeated it again and again as I wandered purposelessly through the streets.

Had I any reason to suppose that I had escaped deception in my transactions with the double-dealer? Had I not found myself tricked by him over and over again? Was my trust in him due to anything better than the fatuous conceit of a greenhorn at a fair, who thinks himself clever enough to outwit a card-sharper? What assurance had I in positive, proved fact that he was not leading me as he professed to be leading the Major? If he had misled me in one thing, might he not also have tricked me in another?

I felt no mortification in the possibility that I had been duped; on the contrary, my heart was quickened with an indefinable joy.

I sought now eagerly to know myself; and every proof I could find that made me see I was a fool and a simpleton added to my exhilaration.

If I could prove that I had deceived myself, then I could believe that Hebe had not deceived me.

At that thought I stopped still in the squalid street, into which I had wandered, and my heart seemed to bound up into my throat, stopping my breath for the minute. When, with a sudden impulse, I moved quickly on, I felt that I was at last on the right track.

I saw that it was by being simple, not making myself cunning, that I could get at the truth. 'If I throw off the convict's cunning, and regain the trusting confidence of happier days,' I said to myself, and then stopped short, unable to complete the conclusion, for the thoughts that poured tumultuously through my mind, breaking in one upon the other.

'Does not innocence sometimes wear a mask as well as guilt?' I asked myself. If one disguise had deceived me, might not the

other also? Why had I believed an old rascal, and not believed Hebe? When I taxed Beeton with deceit, he at once showed me that it was employed to my own advantage. But I had never asked my wife for an explanation. If I had done that, was it impossible that she could have cleared herself? I had condemned her without putting her upon her defence.

My questioning had reached this point, when, coming suddenly on to the quay from the foul and gloomy slums, I was almost blinded by the dazzling brightness of the sun sinking down unclouded upon the still, calm sea. It seemed to my exalted senses like a prophecy.

'O God, let me hope a little longer!' I prayed, as if with the setting of the sun I must sink again into the dark misery of despair.

I was conscious of someone coming quickly towards me. Turning, I found it was Beeton.

He held up his finger, and beckoned me with a movement of his head and eyebrows. I had left him abruptly, and my manner had very likely made him uneasy about his money.

'I have just been round by the road I mentioned,' he said, laying his claw-like fingers on my arm, and speaking in a low voice—'the one running along the back of the grounds in which the Major's house stands. Now, if you would like to precipitate matters—if you prefer a short and speedy vengeance, in place of that I suggested which clearly failed to please you—why, you can take it now.'

I put my hand in my pocket. I believe the old villain thought I was seeking a knife, for he studiously looked another way as he led me along the road. It was the packet of notes I had set aside for him that I sought.

'There she is!' he whispered, pointing through the iron gates that opened into the garden.

She—Hebe, my wife—was standing with a child beside her on a raised terrace beside an orange-tree. Her face was radiant with the glow of the setting sun.

'Go!' I said, putting the notes in the hand of the old man.

CHAPTER LI.

I LEARN THE TRUTH AT LAST.

The gate was unfastened. It opened noiselessly under my hand, and I passed into the garden. Following the path, I approached my wife unseen, as she stood on the terrace with her child looking out towards the sunset. The glory and majesty were reflected on her calm, grave face. Nothing had shaken the evidence against her yet; but I stopped, abashed, with a sense of my own iniquity in suspecting her. An air of purity enveloped her—a god-like armour from which the shafts of doubt rebounded on myself. Holding for support to the marble terrace beside me, I stood there, gazing at her in awe, like a guilty

wretch in the presence of an offended angel at the gate of heaven, whilst a voice within me said, 'What are you that you should judge this woman?'

What was I, indeed, but a faulty creature just emerging from the condition of a brute—scarce better or less hideous than the grinning satyr on the pedestal which supported my unnerved frame?

A sound in the house caught the child's ear. She slipped from Hebe's hand and ran indoors. I made a step forward. Turning quickly, my wife saw me, and the angel becoming human, in a moment she ran down the steps to meet me with a cry of delight. Then suddenly, when she was almost in my arms, she checked herself, and, catching my hands in hers, held me away, whilst her eyes looked into mine with painful, strenuous earnestness.

I could easily have detached her little hands and drawn her to my breast, but I held her from me as she held me from her, feeling that

the supreme moment had come that was to decide our future, and with aching hope in my heart I also strove to find the soul in those dear eyes and read it.

'Tell me,' I faltered, 'tell me that I am guilty, and not you.'

'Guilty!' she murmured in wonder. 'You guilty—of what?'

'Of doubting the purity of the soul I am looking into now.'

'And if you are not guilty,' she whispered in feverish eagerness—'if my soul is not pure?'

'Then God forgive you, and God help me!'

She snatched her hands away with a quick, sharp cry of joy, and, flinging her arms about my neck, drew my head down and kissed me. Then she began to sob, clinging to my neck, and murmuring incoherent sentences, broken by emotion. At length with some return of calmness, she said:

'Oh, my darling! my darling! I knew the real love would come back—not the mere

love of beauty, but the true full love of goodness—in time. Poor love! poor love! tortured and burdened till even your manhood gave way—the kindness and faith and courage all trampled out of the suffering heart. . . . But not the life, dear one. . . . And the life strengthened, and all that was good in it came back little by little, like the beauty and sweetness of tender plants in a garden after they have been beaten down by a storm. . . . Oh, I knew it! I knew it! and the knowledge has given me vigour and brought back the hope that had fled.'

She paused a moment, as if she found speech too poor for the fervid eloquence of her joy and love. Then she resumed in a prouder tone:

'Tell me, love, that if I were as you thought I was you would not suffer me to lie here upon your breast—you would throw me away from you—you would not waste upon a worthless creature this pure love that clings to me for what is good in my being.'

But now that I knew her innocent, I could not in imagination figure the abandonment she saw. She, reading the feeling in my heart, found words where I could not.

'You cannot say that, love! Yet you felt it when you held me from you and looked in my eyes for the truth. . . . Your heart is too strong to break. You must still have thought of me with pity and sorrow, though you would not have stooped to the degradation of mingling your life for ever with mine. That is what you meant when you asked God to forgive me if I were wicked, and to help you to live alone again, poor darling!' Then, her voice sinking under the exhaustion of love, she whispered almost inaudibly, 'Kiss me, darling! kiss me! By Heaven, I am not unworthy of you!'

I lifted her up from her feet that I might feel she was all mine, and her cheek lay against mine when our lips parted.

There was a little pavilion at the bottom

of the garden built in the form of a châlet.

'That is ours,' she said, nodding to it when we came back to earth, so to speak, and stood side by side, yet knitted together. 'I have been all the morning preparing it for you. Take me there: I have so much to tell you.'

We were young lovers again as we stole into the pavilion with a backward glance, fearful of anyone coming to break in upon our happiness.

The air was soft and gentle as a June evening, and sweet with an odour of myrtle and orange-blossom.

The open windows looked over the bay to the snow-capped mountains beyond Sartene. The foliage of the roses trained upon the wall outside made a garland to the window, and stood out in dark relief against the pale sky. Oh! it was a fitting frame for my dear wife, and I held her there, gazing upon her beauty.

'But it isn't only for my prettiness alone you

love me, darling, is it?' she whispered. 'You love me with your very heart now, don't you? But I loved you with my heart, dear, always; and I trusted to my heart, that told me I must have patience and wait. Oh! how I thank God that I waited! Even if I had proved to you that I was guiltless, your love could not have been what it is now.'

'No,' said I; 'it was not time. But how had you the wisdom to see that?'

'It was not wisdom, love. It was just accepting the guidance of my inner heart; that was all.'

'That is the secret!' I exclaimed; '*I* have trusted to my feeble reason—*you* to a higher guidance.'

* * * * *

'Oh! see the stars coming out over there. Do you know, I have been in the garden all the afternoon waiting for you?'

'I thought you expected me to come to-night,' said I.

'That hateful old man told me you would seek me to-night. But I knew you would come before.'

'Was it your heart told you that also?'

'Yes, love. I would sooner trust to that than anything else.'

'So will I for all time to come, dear one!'

'Again, love, again kiss me. Now let us be very calm. What were we talking about? Oh, I know—that dreadful Beeton,' she said, composing herself; then, with an accent of disdain: 'How can one believe such a man as that?'

'I have up to this very day,' said I, with contrition.

'Why, so have I. Oh, my heart was good for nothing then! It betrayed me that morning when he came and told me you had been nearly taken by the police.'

'What morning?' I asked in astonishment.

'The morning after we had parted for the last time—when you went over to Newton so early.'

'He told you I had been nearly taken by the police?' I said in amazement.

'Yes; and that he had helped you to get away, and come here to Ajaccio.'

Here was an explanation I had never dreamt of.

'He never told you that?' she asked.

'No.'

'Then what could you have thought of me when you found me gone?'

'Oh! do not ask me to confess that. Do not remind me of my folly and my crime. Tell only what happened to you.'

'He told me you had gone to Ajaccio, and I believed him; for I did not then know that your innocence had been proved, and that you were no longer in danger. Well, dear, I thought that you would need help, and so I took all our jewels and money out of the drawer, where you had told me you kept them, and went to London as he advised me; and from there I came on here as quickly as I

could. And it was at the Octroi, when I asked about the English in the town, that I learnt our dear friend, Major Cleveden, was here. You may think how surprised he was to see me, and yet how glad; but he saw through Beeton's treachery, and I should certainly have returned to England at once to find you, but that the wicked old man came before we had finished breakfast, and let us know that you were here.'

And yet I had dared to think this dear creature base enough to rob me—base enough for worse than that.

'Tell me more!' I cried eagerly, craving to take upon myself the shame I had laid upon my wife.

'George saw through it all. He said: "That old villain has hoodwinked poor Kit, and led him to believe that you ran away from him to come to me. And your husband has followed you with the intention of taking your life." I was glad to hear that, for I

knew you must love me with your heart then. Oh! I would rather that you killed me than loved believing me wicked. You can never believe that again?'

'No; I, too, can trust my heart now.'

'Then at last you will let me speak about the past?'

'I could forbid you still, but not for that reason which made me shun it before. Look you, dear one; put me to the test. Say not another word about the past, and see how by my life I shall believe you guiltless, though all the world should condemn you.'

'But I don't want all the world to condemn me,' she said, smiling. 'Your wife, like Cæsar's, should be above reproach. I will have all the world to know that she is. All that little world will be here to-night; and they must know all. There is still another and better reason, love; from now until the end we shall be only one in heart and soul, and this dear right hand,' said she, taking

mine and laying hers in it, 'must know all this little left hand doeth. I will never close my eyes at night till I have confessed myself to you, and even my dreams shall be told to you in waking.'

I do not remember what reply I made to this speech, in which tenderness alternated with pride, and every sweet word was accompanied with gentle gesture: I only know that my reply was less worthy of remembrance.

'There is still one more reason,' she continued, 'why everyone should know the truth. It is a debt we owe to George—our brave, true, constant, and dear friend, the Major. For our sake he has done that which he would not have done to save his own life—he has told a lie.'

Her voice faltered as she spoke. I saw a tear roll down her cheek.

'I cannot help it,' she said; 'I cannot think of his devotion, his steadfast love, his fearless chivalry, unmoved. And Helen, too—what

other sister would have made the sacrifice with which she shielded me? Oh! who can say that men and women have fallen away in nobleness? You can guess, dear love, what lie it was that George told for my sake: he told the world I was his wife. The wife he married was Helen.'

'The children are hers!' I gasped.

'The boy is hers; the girl, dear—is yours.'

The shock took my breath away; a sweat burst out from my temples and crisped hair.

'Mine!' I said, beneath my breath.

'Ours, my husband. She was born at Vevey eight months after our separation. When I found that I was to become a mother, I had to confess all to Helen. She told Major Cleveden, who had then offered her his hand. To save me and our child from disgrace, he gave me his name at the same time that he made Helen his wife. She, too, for my sake, gave me the name she was entitled to——'

I could hear no more. My agitation was uncontrollable. I dropped my wife's hand, and rose to my feet from the seat in which we had been sitting hand in hand. A feeling of infinite shame and remorse overpowered me, as I thought of the wrong I had done my wife and this noble friend, and I covered my face with my hands.

'Kit, dear Kit!' murmured my wife, in a tone of expostulation as she took my nerveless hand; 'sit down again.'

'No, no,' I cried; 'the only place for me is here,' and I threw myself upon my knees at her feet.

She sank down at my side, and, slipping her arm round my neck, drew my cheek to hers as she murmured:

'And mine, too, dear love! For we have both to thank God!'

CHAPTER LII.

THE LAST ACT.

'HARK!' whispered Hebe, raising her finger, a new delight brightening her eyes.

There was a light step outside; her quick ear detected whose. Then the handle was tried, and, following a tap on the door, a young voice cried:

'M'ma, dear, are you in there?'

'Who's there?' asked she, squeezing my hand.

'I!'

'"I!" Why, who can that be?'

'Hebe—Hebe Wyndham!' said the child's voice.

My dear wife caught up my hand to her

lips in an ecstasy of joy, saying that I had two Hebes now, and then quickly opened the door.

The same tall graceful child I had seen standing beside my wife on the terrace stood before me; her soft, glistening hair curling low over her forehead, her big eyes fixed on me.

'This is papa, Hebe dear,' said my wife.

She looked at me timidly at first; but suddenly, finding in my face something that overcame her fears, a smile lit up her eyes, and, with the warm impulsiveness of her mother, she ran into my outstretched arms.

I caught her up and held her close to me, whilst my heart throbbed with a strange, new happiness; and the likeness to Hebe that I found in her complexion, her deep, soft eyes and her mouth, became blurred through the tears that sprang into my eyes.

'Isn't she sweet, dear?' whispered my wife.

'She is like you, love,' I answered. But

I could say no more. A feeling overcame me like that a man might have in finding himself on the edge of a precipice from which he has escaped by a miracle. For, recalling the events of the night on which I had taken my wife from the Hermitage, I suspected that it was this, my own child, whose life I had been tempted to take away.

Going up to the house, my wife on one side of me and my daughter on the other, we came, at a turn of the path, suddenly face to face with the Major. He had been prepared for a change in my appearance, and, after a start of surprise, he held out his hand to me with a smile that showed I had changed for the better in his eyes.

We stood holding each other by the hand in silence for a moment; then he said:

'I did you an injustice eleven years ago; I am glad to acknowledge it now.'

My reply was not heroic; I fear it was

incoherent. The acknowledgment I owed him was not to be made in a few words.

In the evening I told my story, omitting nothing that could set the conduct of my wife and my friend in a true light. Knowing the motive that had brought many people here, I tried to confine myself to a simple narrative of facts and avoid any evidence of feeling: but my subject betrayed me into enthusiasm when I spoke of the Major's chivalry, and my voice failed me from emotion when I told of my wife's patient love.

EPILOGUE.

TO MADAME HELEN CLEVEDEN, VILLA BALLASTRINO, AJACCIO.

'Watersmeet, Linton, N. Devon,
July 8, 188—.

My darling Sister,

We found your welcome letters and the photographs on the table when we came in from our drive this evening. It is strange to think that we are henceforth to live so far apart after living so long together. Almost as hard to realize as the fact that dear George is devoting himself to the business of growing oranges and lemons; but we are very glad that you have found a home so delightful, and an occupation that, as it interests your

husband, must add to your happiness. Only, as you see, *my* gladness is just a tiny bit dashed with selfish regrets. I would have *all* whom I love close to me. But my dearest Kit consoles me with the promise that we shall most certainly spend the winter months with you—if you will have us.

I remember Ballastrino quite well, with its lovely terraces, where the deep-green foliage of the lemons and oranges spread 'thick inlaid with patines of bright gold,' and the beautiful bouquet of palms rising beyond—all compassed about with the amphitheatre of olive-covered hills, facing the ever-blue Mediterranean. Oh! shall I ever forget those olive woods, where my dear husband and I wandered away from you in the spring seeking ferns, and heath, and myrtle, and cistus, and cyclamen? The very memory makes me cry with its excess of joy. Do not for a moment, dear, think that I am one whit less happy now than then. No! no! The delight is calmer—that is all. My life is full of real, real happiness;

and each day I find myself richer than yesterday by some added joy.

Last week I was seized with a desire to go back to the little cottage on the moor, and my dear husband, yielding to my caprice, took me there. It was just as we had left it. I expected to feel a desire to live the old life over again there—to renew the many joys I felt as my dear Kit came back little by little to his nobler self. But the charm was gone, and I think we were both glad to leave it and return to our home here. I know the secret now—it is because my beloved husband is nobler and wiser and better than in those old days.

He is sitting here with me writing to your husband. George did well to consult him about the new house you are going to build; for Kit—I think I may say it without boasting—understands such subjects better than any man in the world.

Our dear child adds to our joy; she is devoted (as she well may be) to her father,

and has the greatest admiration for his genius. She is learning to model in clay, and already puts to shame my feeble attempts in that direction. They go together for long walks that 'poor mama' has not the strength to undertake; and they work side by side at the same bench, while I look on, trying not to envy my own daughter and smothering an unnatural jealousy. Oh, how I wish I could do more to deserve his constant and unvarying love! But my husband would not have me forsake music for any other art, even if I had the ability; and in playing to him while he carves I find my solace for having no higher gifts.

Now, darling, I must say good-bye, for dinner is served.

Ever your loving sister,

HEBE WYNDHAM.

P.S.—I cut out a paragraph from a newspaper to send you, but it is mislaid; it was the last we shall ever hear of that horrible old

man, Beeton. It seems he was arrested in London for a most impudent forgery, and seeing that there was no hope of escape, he ended his days in the police cell by suicide.

H. W.

THE END.

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